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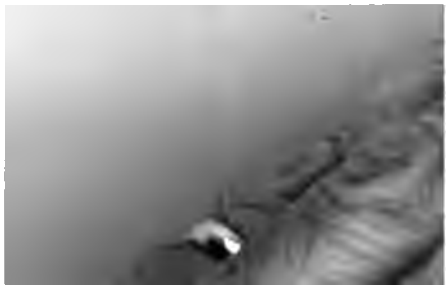
HER SON

—
H. A. VACHELL





1912










HER SON



BY THE SAME AUTHOR
THE HILL
BROTHERS
THE PROCESSION OF LIFE
THE SHADOWY THIRD
THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY
JOHN CHARITY
LIFE AND SPORT ON THE
PACIFIC SLOPE
THE FACE OF CLAY



DOROTHY.



HER SON

A CHRONICLE OF LOVE

BY HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL
//



LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1907



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A3 H4

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TO MY MOTHER



Give her the living child . . . she is the mother thereof.
1 KINGS iii. 27.

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HER SON

CHAPTER I

OAKLEY STREET

As soon as she had parted from Gasgoyne, Dorothy Fairfax walked to her tiny house in Oakley Street, reaching Albert Bridge just two minutes after leaving Battersea Park. Half-way across she paused, looking back, smiling and faintly blushing, because she could see the trees beneath whose discreet shade her lover had kissed her with a parting injunction to scurry home before the rain fell. Overhead, a black thunderous cloud obscured the radiance of a July afternoon; and the air, like the water in the river, seemed to flow sluggishly and in eddies, as if driven by opposing forces. Dorothy noticed that the tide had begun to ebb, and this stirred in her for the thousandth time a vague, pleasant melancholy, and the sense of the rhythm of things—the systole and diastole of Nature's heart. Her reflections were scattered by a tremendous clap of thunder, which shook the bridge. The foot-



passengers quickened their pace, glancing up with eyes dazed by the glare of the lightning. It was certain that in a moment the rain would come down with tropical violence. Dorothy lifted a well-hung skirt, and began to run. More than one woman watched her with envy, more than one man with surprise and delight, as she sped swiftly and smoothly on, running with the ease and grace of Atalanta. Not that she was a beauty. Her features were irregular, challenging interest rather than admiration. But her air of sanity and health—the bright hair, the fine skin, the clear eyes—appealed irresistibly. Below this charming surface, and slightly obscured by it, lay a certain authority and decisiveness not in the least aggressive or masculine, but distinctly feminine and modern; the look of the capable woman who knows that a definite place in the world has been assigned to her.

“Oh, you nymph!” muttered an actor, meeting her vivid glance as she flashed by him.

She caught the murmur, and smiled. Huge drops of rain were pattering down upon a beautiful new hat. Through her thin linen dress she could feel the lashing shower. Truly she was a nymph flying from a force which already had overtaken her. Inevitably—so she reflected—she would be drenched through and through before she reached the Middlesex shore. Realising this, she stopped running, and allowed herself to be entertained by the

spectacle about her. More than half the people on the bridge were panic-stricken by the lightning. A second clap of thunder, even louder than the first, provoked a howl of terror from a stout young woman who was carrying a baby on one arm and dragging a child of five by the hand. Both baby and child, seized with the contagion of fear, howled also. The bridge rocked, groaning and travailing, like a creature in anguish.

"Dear, dear!" sobbed the young woman. "Ain't this awful?"

The question, addressed to none in particular, was flung to the wind, which whirled it on to Dorothy, together with a tall hat belonging to an elderly gentleman. Dorothy stopped both. As the elderly gentleman retrieved his hat with mumbled thanks, Dorothy answered the young woman's question.

"It is not awful," she said, with authority. "The storm is at least half a mile away. Let me carry that baby: you are positively dead beat."

With a firm hand she took the baby from the astonished mother and soothed it. The rain streamed down so thickly that neither bank of the river was visible from the centre of the long bridge.

"We may as well take it easy," said Dorothy. "I'm soaking, and so are you."

The stout young woman glanced at her purple plush dress and then at Dorothy's pink linen frock.



"I nearly killed myself a-runnin'," she gasped. "But it's done for. Four and tenpence a yard, too! Keep up, car'n't yer?" She jerked the child's arm. "An', look 'ere, if yer stop yer noise and be'ave yerself, I'll see that the thunder an' lightnin' don't strike yer dead."

The child stopped sobbing. Dorothy laughed, but not unsympathetically. Then, noting the misery with which her companion regarded the purple plush garment, she added softly, "My hat cost me two guineas; I can't afford another this summer. We must grin and bear it."

"I never was one o' the grinnin' ones," retorted the stout young woman; "and I can an' do say, 'God's will be done'; but the rain might have held off till I'd got into a bus. My! there it goes agine."

This, however, was the last clap. The storm passed on down the river, leaving a delightful fragrance and freshness behind it. The sun blazed out, transmuting all things from lead into gold; the barges on the Surrey side looked as if newly painted and varnished; the houses along the Chelsea Embankment suffused a sort of rosy radiance.

"Yer've been very kind, ma'am," said the stout young woman, as she took the baby from Dorothy's arms, "and it's queer how biby took to yer, seein' as she allus is so perticler with stryngers. I dessay yer've one or two of yer own?"

"No," said Dorothy, with a slight blush. "I'm unmarried."

"I beg pardon, miss, I'm sure; but I did tyke yer fer a merried lidy. An' the wy yer handled the kid——"

"I am very fond of children," said Dorothy. "Good-bye."

They parted at the end of the bridge. Dorothy walked down Oakley Street till she came to her own house. She unlocked the front door with a latch-key, smiling with satisfaction, because it was so delightful to find herself at home. Within five minutes she had slipped out of her wet things and into a dry frock, in the bosom of which she fastened a fine rose, one of the bunch which Gasgoyne had sent that morning, with a note saying that he would be in Battersea Park at four o'clock.

She sank into an easy-chair, giving herself up to the thought of her lover, evoking his image, hearing his deep voice which had thrilled her from the first moment they had met. Always Dorothy had known that such a man would come into her life, and that when he came she would recognise him instantly with no absurd semi-savage flutterings and doubtings, but sanely, joyously, triumphantly.

Long ago, her father and teacher, the famous doctor, had predicted what would come to pass. She could hear his kindly voice, with its attractive, penetrating intonations, saying: "My dear Doll, your mate is looking for you,



and I'm training you to know him when you meet him."

The training, according to her mother's relations—the Helminghams of East Anglia—had been thorough, perhaps, but peculiar. George Fairfax had taught his daughter much of what he knew concerning the human body, and nearly all that he surmised concerning the human mind. The Helminghams were too well-bred to indict George Fairfax's methods, but they told East Anglia that things would have been very different if Dorothy's mother had survived Dorothy's birth.

Lying back in her chair, sensible of the peace and freshness which succeed a storm, Dorothy reflected for the thousand-and-first time that her father would have approved of Dick Gasgoyne as a son-in-law.

"Wouldn't he, Solomon?"

Solomon, the Yorkshire tyke—so named because he was the most intelligent person in Dogdom—assented with enthusiasm. Solomon had not accompanied his mistress to Battersea Park, because he knew—none better—the humiliation of playing gooseberry; but being, as has been said, supercaninely intelligent, he quite understood Dick Gasgoyne to be as necessary to Dorothy's happiness as he was himself.

For in Dorothy met, and were fused, two extremes: the modern and the primitive maiden, an admirable combination of complex

and simple. The Arcadian type, too often exasperatingly stupid, and yet so delightfully serene, had been reproduced with a mentality essentially urban. Nevertheless, first and last, she represented all that wifehood and motherhood may include.

She herself was conscious of this. Indeed, till the moment of his death (which had come with appalling suddenness) Dorothy's future as wife and mother had been a subject of never-failing interest between father and daughter. George Fairfax spoke of love candidly and yet with absolute delicacy, as a compelling force which, directed aright, must work for good. Of the evil of such a power abused he had intended to speak also when Dorothy became older, but he died before time gave to him the opportunity, leaving behind him a great reputation, and a small fortune, sufficient to bring in some five or six hundred a year to Dorothy. He might have saved ten times as much, but he had never learned to say "no" to the pitiful appeals of poverty and pain.

After his death she went to live with the Helminghams, her mother's people. Sir Augustus Helmingham, M.P., J.P., and a baronet of James the First's creation, possessed almost everything which this world can give except a sense of humour. This was not missed either in East Anglia or in Portman Square, but it made an enormous difference to Dorothy. Ultimately it drove her to Oakley

Street. She could never forget her uncle's first words after her father's death, spoken in that father's consulting-room, beneath the very chamber where he was lying dead. Sir Augustus, let it be said, had come to town in almost undignified haste; he sincerely wished to do the really right thing. He was grieved; he felt paternal; but he made a sad mess of it.

"My dear child"—Dorothy was sobbing in his arms—"I can put myself in your place; I know exactly how you feel"—Sir Augustus had used this serviceable phrase to mothers bereaved of children, and even to children who had lost beloved dolls—"but you must dry your eyes and endeavour to turn this affliction to your spiritual profit."

And then Dorothy had laughed.

Sir Augustus dismissed the laugh with the charitable explanation—hysteria; but it rang shockingly in his ears; it indicated want of balance. He met the emergency with practical common sense.

"I prescribe a glass of port wine at once."

And again Dorothy had laughed.

The next two years were spent in East Anglia and Portman Square. Dorothy never failed to speak warmly of the kindness shown to her by both uncle and aunt, but she knew from the first that she was a stranger within their gates; alien not to their affection, but, what is nearly as hard to bear, their inherited

customs and traditions. There was a place prepared—a very large and comfortable place, delightfully furnished, guaranteed to suit the average young gentlewoman, but, unhappily, a misfit for Dorothy.

"We don't quite understand you," murmured Lady Helmingham.

"You make me feel a beast," said Dorothy ruefully, "because I do understand you, Aunt Charlotte, and it doesn't seem fair that you shouldn't understand me. I'm a sort of Wonderful Puzzle Fifteen to you; I know."

"You are, my dear," her aunt sighed, "and I suppose that's the end of it."

"I fear it's just the beginning. Uncle Augustus and you must let me 'dree my ain weird.' I think I should like to become a hospital nurse."

"Dorothy!"

"If there were *vivandières* in our Army——"

"My child, pray don't joke about such serious matters."

"I am not joking, Aunt Charlotte. It is your duty to reflect what a shocking example I am to your Amy."

"Really, Dorothy——"

"Really and truly. Amy understudies me already. In fact, thinking for you, for Amy, and for myself, I have summed up the situation in one word—budge!"

"Budge?"

"Do a bunk, as the boys put it."

"If you would be less—er—flippant——"

Dorothy took her aunt's hand ; then, bending down, she kissed the protesting, querulous, kindly face.

"I am sorry," she whispered. "But why shouldn't I paddle my—I mean, don't you think that, under all the circumstances"—unconsciously there was a very capital imitation of Sir Augustus—"it might be wiser for me to go?"

"To go—where?"

"I have thought of a flat. Solomon and I would be quite happy in a flat."

"In a flat?" Twenty-five years ago few spinsters, young or old, dared to live in flats. "Solomon and you? A propos, Dorothy, I wish you had given your terrier a more suitable name. People draw the most absurd inferences. Only yesterday dear Lady Winterbotham asked me if Solomon was a connection of ours. I had to explain. As to your living alone in a flat——"

"I am never alone with Solomon."

"Your uncle would say—*impossible!*"

"Surely not that?"

"You, a mere chit of a girl, not yet twenty, with a flat of your own——"

"In, not with. I object to the 'with,' although originally *you* suggested that I should."

"I suggested—what?"

"That I should marry and live with a flat."

"Are you speaking of Lord Ipswich?"

"Certainly. Everybody called him 'It' at Eton and Oxford. Poor 'It.' Before he honoured me with his attentions, all of you spoke of him as a flat."

"He is very much in love with you, and has been admirably brought up. He would never give a wife a moment's uneasiness. And some young men——" Aunt Charlotte resolutely shut her lips and glanced down her aristocratic nose.

"As for Teddy Ipswich," said Dorothy, with slightly heightened colour, "I will use uncle's and your word—impossible!"

No more was said upon this occasion, but the word "budge" became an obsession to Dorothy. Other men were charmed by her pleasant looks and intelligence, but, in the end, each and all were condemned as impossible. Then Dick Gasgoyne appeared.

Dick—who had just returned from the Balkans—lived in Grub Street upon the money which he could persuade appreciative editors to give in exchange for his "stuff." Dick appeared in Portman Square with proper credentials. Sir Augustus and Lady Helmingham begged to have the honour of Mr. Richard Gasgoyne's company upon the 25th of May. In a corner of the card was inscribed the word "*Dancing.*" The card was intended for Richard Gasgoyne, of the Coldstream, and it was Lady Helmingham's mis-



fortune, not her fault, that the pasteboard was misdirected (by a secretary paid to look out names and addresses in a directory) to a club instead of Chelsea Barracks.

Richard Gasgoyne the Wrong accepted Richard Gasgoyne the Right's invitation, which is, after all, the marrow of the matter.

He came to Portman Square in a bus, believing himself to be an honoured guest, and he was received as such, for Lady Helmingham had never met the Coldstreamer. As Dick mounted the fine flight of stairs, at the head of which stood his be-diamonded hostess, he challenged attention by reason of his face and stature. Lady Helmingham blinked when his name fell loudly upon her ear. She has confessed that she was dazzled. And at once she presented Apollo to her niece, Dorothy Fairfax. Dick looked keenly at Dorothy and asked for a dance. Before that dance—and it happened to be the second—was over, Dorothy had been put into possession of the facts. She had heard of the Coldstreamer, and this was not he. Dick, who had Cæsarean attributes, attacked boldly. He was enchanted with Dorothy, and this splendid entertainment had the additional attraction of an adventure. When Lady Helmingham welcomed him so effusively with a flying allusion to his dear mother, or dear aunt, Dick grasped the situation.

"I'm here under false pretences," he told Dorothy.

"You are," she admitted, rather gaspingly, for they had danced the valse through without stopping. "I was told you were a shocking performer. I suppose the standard is high in the Guards."

"I'm not in the Guards," said Dick.

"Surely you are Mr. Richard Gasgoyne?"

"I am."

"Then——"

"It will take some time to tell."

"Hardly anybody has come yet. Tell it."

Dick told it, and the story lost nothing in the telling, for already he was a practised teller of tales. Like a true artist, he made the interest of his tale cumulative, and when he finished Dorothy was athirst for more.

"Is that all?"

"Nearly all; naturally, I have left some out."

Afterwards the careless words came back to Dorothy. He had left out "some." What she knew, however, must be made known to the reader. Dick was the son of a country parson, who had pinched himself sorely to send his boy to Winchester and Oxford. The Gasgoyne in the Coldstream appeared to be a second cousin.

"I've not met him," said Dick, with engaging candour. "They tell me he's a bit of an ass. It's a fact that I've cut my swell relations."

"That is better than their cutting you," said Dorothy.



"Exactly." He was delighted with her reply. "You see, I wasn't going to sponge on them, and when my father died I found myself without a rap. I had to leave Oxford, and earn my bread and butter."

"I am sure you earned it."

"As to that—well, I'm not one to count 'the billows past,' but I have dined and supped off a ha'penny bun; very satisfying, buns. Now, I'm all right."

Details were then forthcoming about his work—the work of a journalist. The minutes flew while Dick talked and Dorothy listened. He asked for, and was accorded, another dance. Dorothy introduced him to half a dozen girls. You may be sure that the young fellow enjoyed himself vastly well, but he waited with impatience for his second dance with Dorothy. Meantime, Lady Helmingham had discovered that a mistake had been made.

"It seems," she whispered to her niece, "that this very charming-looking young man is not in the Coldstream."

"He is a cousin," Dorothy replied. "The card went to the wrong address."

"A cousin—ah! It doesn't matter. He seems to be enjoying himself, my dear."

"He is the sort of man who can get satisfaction out of ha'penny buns," Dorothy murmured. The allusion was wasted upon the good aunt, who had other matters to attend to. Dorothy was whisked away by an admirable

dancer, but he valed less smoothly than Richard Gasgoyne.

By the end of the second dance the mischief had been done. The pair sat out the interval and the following Lancers. Dorothy told her story. When Dick learned that she was her father's daughter his face beamed.

"You must be the right sort," he muttered.

"Thanks."

"But it's rather queer that you should be Lady Helmingham's niece."

"I'm sure she thinks so," laughed Dorothy.

"You have ambitions other than——" he indicated the sparkling crowd.

"Ambitions? Yes."

"If one might venture to ask——"

"But of course you may ask. It is so unintelligent not to ask. I've asked you a score of questions, haven't I? Well, my great ambition at present is to live in a flat."

"Alone?"

"With Solomon."

"Solomon——?"

"My terrier."

"Oh, your terrier." Dick laughed. "I should like to meet Solomon."

"That goes without saying. I'll ask him if he will let me present you."

"When?"

His face grew very serious; her eyes fell before his.

"And where?"



"This is very flattering to—Solomon."

"I am dying to have the honour of his acquaintance. Time and place, please."

She considered, puckering up her brows. Dick adumbrated, so to speak, future greatness by the boldness and ability with which he confronted the first serious obstacle.

"I might drop in to lunch," he suggested.

"To lunch?" Dorothy put up her fan to conceal an amazed smile.

"Why not? I'm sure Lady Helmingham would rise to the occasion, if——"

"If——?"

"If I threw an alluring fly——"

She regarded him with a slightly different expression. He was presenting the enterprising journalist, and Dorothy told herself that he had chosen the right profession. She realised, with a curious conviction, that he was certain to succeed. At any rate, she showed herself willing to indicate the right kind of fly.

"Lady Helmingham is very interested in—bazaars. She will have an Art stall at the Albert Hall next week. If you are asked to lunch, I think I can answer for Solomon. He has a most unapostolic intolerance of fools, but he always recognises and welcomes ability."

Dick got his invitation to luncheon. When the crowds had thinned after supper, the young man approached his hostess, who held out her hand, thinking that he wished to say "good-night."

"I'm not going on to the Duchess's," said Dick genially, "partly because I've not been asked, and partly because this is much too charming to leave. I came up to say that when you aimed at a falcon and hit a crow, it was very lucky for the crow."

"If you have had a pleasant evening——"

"I have, I have. By the way, I am told that you are taking a stall at the bazaar to be held in the Albert Hall. You mustn't think that I'm in a hurry to discharge my obligations, but as I understand that yours is an Art stall, perhaps you would let me send you a couple of water-colour drawings."

"This is very nice of you, Mr. Gasgoyne."

"The only thing"—his tone became deprecating—"is—are they good enough? Perhaps you will let me bring them here to show to you. And I know several artists; in so good a cause I think I might persuade one or two to contribute."

"If you would. My stall, I fear, will be rather bare. You are very kind."

"Not at all. I am really interested in——" He broke off suddenly, and added in a different tone, "Shall I bring you what I can find next Sunday afternoon?"

"If you have no better engagement, won't you come to luncheon? My niece says you were in Plevna."

He hesitated, as if he were mentally glancing at an engagement-book. In reality he was



reflecting, not without a qualm, how easily his guileless fish had been hooked.

"With the greatest pleasure," he replied.

.

Upon the following Sunday Dick was introduced to Solomon. Dorothy had told herself that Solomon's instinct was infallible. If he liked Apollo her own judgment would be fortified. If, as so often happened, Solomon manifested indifference or antipathy to the stranger, why, then Dorothy's merely feminine predilection would need amendment and modification. Really, it was an ordeal for Gasgoyne, because Solomon, as has been said, was so very particular, so hypercritical. But the interview began and ended triumphantly. Gasgoyne was acclaimed unmistakably as the right sort.

Within a week Dick and Dorothy were engaged. The word "Cæsarean" (already used) describes Dick's methods so adequately that we are justified in skipping details. The young fellow was born under some happy conjunction of Venus and Mars. He carried high places by storm, although, like the illustrious Julius, he never disregarded the necessity of preparation. But when he moved, he moved swiftly; when he struck, he struck hard.

He had the audacity to call upon Sir Augustus and submit, without any grovelling, his claims to be received in East Anglia and Portman

Square as a nephew-in-law! Sir Augustus listened courteously and asked for information concerning settlements, adding civilly, "Perhaps, Mr. Gasgoyne, you would prefer to give me the names of your solicitors. Mine are Silkstone and Limpet, of Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"I," said Dick, "am my own solicitor. As for settlements, Sir Augustus, I propose to settle on your niece everything I have."

Half-a-dozen questions revealed the fact that "everything" stood for a stout, well-muscled body and an active, sanguine mind.

"I am earning about four hundred a year," said Dick, "and my income is steadily increasing. With what Miss Fairfax has we shall do very well, very well indeed."

"I can consent to no engagement between yourself and my niece," replied Sir Augustus frigidly.

Soon after Dick withdrew. Let it be added that he accepted defeat with a gallant smile, not without its effect on the baronet. When the door of the library closed, Sir Augustus—who had hunted in his youth—muttered to himself: "The fellow is a thruster." Then he rang the bell, and said to the butler that he wished to have a few minutes' conversation with Miss Fairfax.

What followed was described by Dorothy in one word—"Ructions."

The young lady refused to give up her lover; Sir Augustus and Lady Helmingham instructed

the servants that they were "not at home" to Mr. Richard Gasgoyne; and the atmosphere in the big town house became very chilly. For the baronet was one of those benefactors who undo thoughtful and kind actions with thoughtless and unkind words. With how much steadier and purer a flame the torch of gratitude would burn were it not so often blown upon by gusty verbosity on the part of those who have lighted it. Sir Augustus would send a poor kinsman a handsome cheque, or devote much time to securing him a billet, but having done these good deeds he would assume henceforward the right to dictate to, to sneer at, to play the deuce generally with his beneficiary. Indeed, it could be said of him that the persons who owed him most were the ones who liked him least.

In July, Dorothy took possession of a wee house in Oakley Street, and the announcement of her engagement and forthcoming marriage appeared in *The Morning Post*. Dorothy was now of age, and her own mistress, to use a ridiculously false phrase. She had not many friends, caring little for smart society, but more than one offered her sanctuary, entreated her, indeed, to place herself and her romantic love affairs in discreet hands. Moira Curragh, an Irish countess, wrote:

"Dear Doll,—An Englishman's house may be his castle (or his dungeon) but an Irish-woman's home is a hotel for her friends. Come to me at once, my Juliet."

But Dorothy took her own line amid a chorus of protestation from everybody except Dick. A sub-editorship of a rising daily newspaper had been promised to him. The wedding-day had been named. After a brief honeymoon the pair would return to Oakley Street.

Having passed the Rubicon, Dorothy gave herself up to being rapturously happy. Her own testimony is ample on this point. She invented a word to express her condition. "*I walladge*," she wrote to Lady Curragh, whose home was a hotel for her friends. "*Walladge*," she pointed out, was a combination of "*wallow*" and "*stodge*." She had stuffed herself with happiness, and in what she could not consume she wallowed. Happiness is so essentially abstract that any concrete presentment of it must be more or less inaccurate and misleading. But it is necessary to give an impression at least of what took place during this memorable month of July. During the day Dorothy ransacked curiosity shops in search of furniture suitable to what Dick called the Doll's House. The massive mahogany Victorian chairs and tables and sideboards belonging to George Fairfax had been sold, but his coloured prints and engravings, his water-colour drawings, his books and china had remained Dorothy's most precious possessions. It was not easy to find things good enough to form a background to these, but what a delightful quest! Half of each afternoon was spent with Dick, generally

upon the river. He had his work, and he was working hard, but he came to Dorothy each day looking as fresh and fit as she did. If she "wallaged," so did he. Solomon's nose, it is true, was out of joint, but he carried a stiff tail, and his knee action was universally admired. After all, he had his mornings with Dorothy, and not an article in the Doll's House was bought unless it were highly commended by this canine connoisseur.

When the sun shone radiantly, when, alone in Dick's punt, in some shady backwater of the Thames, the lovers listened to the hum of the bees amongst the willows, and the soft lapping of the stream as it glided by, Dorothy wondered how long the idyll would last. It seemed amazing that Dick should be so exactly right, so satisfying, and so different from other men whom she had known. One day, she said softly :

"Dick, you make love so nicely that one is driven to the conclusion that you've had a lot of practice."

"I have," he replied. "Of course," he hastened to add, "it was make-believe, not the real thing; but I learned a wrinkle or two."

"And you got a wrinkle or two," said Dorothy, eyeing certain faint lines about his eyes and forehead. Her glance, so steady, so passionate and so pure, brought the blood to his cheeks. Shamefacedly, he opened his lips to speak, and then, as suddenly, closed them.

"What were you going to say?" she whispered, touching his hair with her fingers. They were sitting side by side at the bottom of a red-cushioned punt. Dick had been reading aloud his latest—and, of course, his best—short story. He threw the MS. to the end of the punt, and captured her fingers, holding them tightly in his.

"Dorothy," he replied gravely, "you have been very generous. I feel as if no man ever knew the girl he loved quite so well as I know you. My God! what an education this last month has been to me!"

"And to me," she echoed.

"But I," his voice trembled, "have not been so generous. There are bits, ugly bits, in my life which I may show to you some day, but not now."

"Why not now?"

"I have had a tough time of it, dear," he felt the sympathetic pressure of her hand in his, "and I have come in contact with pitch; one can't say more to a girl such as you, but it is enough, isn't it? You understand? You are not a prude. And when you touched me that first evening, I became clean. You must believe that."

"Yes," she said steadily. "I believe that."

He raised her hand and kissed it, but he did not kiss her lips. Afterwards she remembered this, when speech was forced upon both of them.

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Upon the day when Dorothy was caught in the storm upon Battersea Bridge, we left her, it will be remembered, in an arm-chair chewing the cud of sweet reminiscence. Nearly a fortnight had passed since that particular talk between Dick and herself in which so much that was vital to both of them had been left unsaid. Upon these things left unsaid Dorothy had pondered not a little. She hoped and believed that Dick's youth had not been as the youth of some men she had met. But in any case—and here, of course, she was postulating against the unknowable—in any case he loved her and she loved him, and they were young and strong, and able to surmount obstacles. The present was theirs and the future. Was it not fatuous to speculate at haphazard concerning the past? She put the question to Solomon, who was lying upon the carpet in front of her, staring at her with his keen shrewd eyes.

"You have never cried over spilt milk, Solomon."

Solomon got up, stretched himself, yawned—his manners were not always those of Louis XIV.—and said, "Wouf-f-f," very contemptuously.

"If I broke the ten commandments over and over again, you would love me just as much, wouldn't you?"

Solomon wagged his tail and winked. He was not a good tyke, and never pretended to

be. Had he not tried to murder Amy Helmingham's pug, because Dorothy had taken that spoiled darling for a walk? Was he not a confirmed poacher, a harrier of respectable cats, a thief even?

"But spilt milk leaves a horrid stain, Solomon. You know it does."

Solomon deliberately turned his back, lay down, and put his nose between his paws. He was pretending to go to sleep, because this sort of conversation bored him.

Dorothy felt herself to be rebuked. But Dick's past seemed to beckon to her out of Dick's eyes. She stared at his photograph which stood upon the mantelpiece. Once she had vowed that she would never marry a dark man. Gasgoyne was very dark. He had that white, clear skin so seldom seen in England, and black hair, brows, and lashes. Had his eyes been dark he would, unquestionably, have looked foreign, too Italian, but his eyes were a Saxon blue, and his features were also Saxon, firmly moulded and square.

Afterwards, she sometimes wondered whether Gasgoyne's past would have come to her as it did, had she not, so to speak, put herself *en rapport* with it by constant thought concerning it. For she had come to this conclusion: she wished to know. We are going a little too fast, but it is, perhaps, expedient to admit now that without this previous preparation of the soil the seed might never have taken root.

Falling upon a hard, smooth surface of innocence or ignorance or indifference, a gust of natural indignation would have blown it away.

As Dorothy stared at the portrait her maid entered. Susan Judkins had been an old and valued servant of George Fairfax, and Dorothy's nurse. In Oakley Street she acted as maid and parlour-maid.

"Well, Susan?"

"A young person to see you, Miss Dorothy."

"From the dressmaker?" Young persons from dressmakers and milliners were frequent visitors at the Doll's House during this month of July.

Susan — everybody else called her Mrs. Judkins—shut the door with an air of mystery, and, approaching close to Dorothy, lowered her head and voice.

"She don't look as if she came from any respectable place. Her name is—Miss Crystal Wride."

"I wonder what she wants. Is she young?"

"Quite old enough to know better, I should say."

"Pretty?"

Susan Judkins sniffed, but she was honest.

"Men would call her that," she admitted.

"Show her in."

Susan sniffed again, but obeyed, knowing that it was useless to combat her mistress's whims. Miss Crystal Wride entered, staring

defiantly first at Susan, and then at Dorothy. With her came an odour of cheap scent and damp clothes.

At the same moment, Solomon, bristling with rage, began to growl. Then, as the girl advanced, he flew straight at her, and laid hold of her skirt. It was quite plain that he did not think this young woman a suitable person to visit his beloved mistress.

"Let go, you little devil!"

"Solomon! How dare you! Lie down at once, do you hear?"

Solomon obeyed, still growling. But during the interview that followed, his eyes never left Miss Wride's face.

"Has he torn your dress?" Dorothy asked.

"No."

"I am so very sorry. Won't you sit down and tell me what I can do for you?"

"I'll stand, thank you."

Susan Judkins withdrew, very reluctantly. We say more for her character than could be condensed into a couple of pages, when we add that she did not tarry a moment outside the door, but hurried at once to her own room.

Miss Wride pulled a frayed pocket-book out of a pocket, and took from it a newspaper clipping—the announcement, in fact, of Dorothy's approaching marriage.

"This is true, I suppose?"

"Yes."

At this moment Dorothy divined that Gasgoyne's past had come in person to satisfy her curiosity. She had wished to know, and the gods had decreed that she should know. Her face changed subtly as she took note of the stranger, her hat, much bedraggled, her soiled kid gloves, her boots.

"I ain't up to much, am I?" Crystal Wride asked, with a sudden derisive smile, "but I was good enough for him—till he met you."

She pointed at Gasgoyne's photograph, enthroned securely in the place of honour upon the mantelpiece.

"You had better sit down," faltered Dorothy.

"I'll stand," the girl returned savagely.

Certainly she was more than pretty. Indeed, beautiful, with a lithe grace which in repose—and she was standing perfectly still—suggested a Tanagra statuette. The resemblance was the more striking because her wet skirt clung closely to her figure, accentuating the admirable lines of it.

Dorothy may have thought of these things afterwards, for the moment she was sensible only of one overmastering emotion—that of fear. The animal in this girl was about to spring upon her, and she was defenceless; the animal which could never have glided by Lady Helmingham's powdered footmen. An insane desire seized her to scream, to rush from the room, to hide herself. But

the animal could move faster, speak louder, than she.

“Why have you come here?”

“To look at you.”

At the insolence of the words and the glance which accompanied them Dorothy regained her self-control, and with it her keenness of perception and apprehension. In a different voice she said quietly :

“Then please look at me, and go.”

“Are you frightened? I’m stronger than you. I could scratch your eyes out.”

She came nearer, her fingers curving, her magnificent eyes flashing. Dorothy rose, slightly trembling. It was her first experience of life as it is lived in wild places, by wild people. Instinctively she realised this, and faced the situation.

“Who are you?” she asked.

It is said that a very simple question will serve to divert the attention of a madman. The girl menacing Dorothy with eyes and gestures was not mad, but she stood close to madness, upon the crumbling edge of it.

“I’m an actress: I dance and sing at the Levity Theatre.”

Dorothy filled in details, swiftly. Then, quite suddenly, for the words seemed to burst from her without volition on her part, she whispered, with unmistakable sincerity:

“Oh! what misery you have suffered.”

The sympathy in her voice pierced a crust of rage, jealousy, and despair.

"Don't!" the girl exclaimed huskily, putting up her hands, as if to shut off the sympathy and sorrow. Suddenly she collapsed, and, falling back on the chair in which she had been asked to sit not a minute before, began to sob with a violence that appalled Dorothy, who knew not what to do or say in an emergency so poignant and unexpected, conscious herself of misery impending above her own head, feeling, for the first time in her life, that she was whirling far from familiar beacons, at the mercy of tremendous and inexorable forces.

Presently the sobs became less violent, dwindling away into moans. Dorothy divined that the passion which might have left hideous marks upon her own face had spent itself. She touched a nerveless hand.

"If you will tell me everything——"

The girl looked up, trembling. Then, in her hoarse, broken voice, she muttered defiantly:

"Suppose I told you I came here meaning to hurt you."

"No, no," said Dorothy.

"But I did—there!"

"What good would that do?"

"It would hurt—*him*. And—and make him, feel as—I feel as—as——" Her eyes dropped wearily. She attempted a laugh that brought tears to Dorothy's eyes. "Now, I've not got much more strength than a worm. You'd get

the best of it. See!" She held out her hand which trembled: the colour ebbed from her cheeks.

"One moment," said Dorothy. "Don't let yourself go!"

She hurried from the room, welcoming action, movement, anything that would banish the curious paralysis of mind which seemed to be assailing her. When she returned with sal volatile and eau de Cologne, after she had administered them, as minute by minute strength came back to her visitor, so also strength returned to Dorothy's mind. She saw the issues involved, and faced them valiantly, putting to rout compromise and weakness.

While Crystal Wride lay half-fainting before her, expediency had whispered: "Take advantage of her weakness, patch her up, pack her into a cab, drop her now and for ever out of your life!"

Instead, she took the poor passion-torn creature back to her lodgings, supporting her tenderly.



CHAPTER II

VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD

DOROTHY'S first impression of these lodgings remained a vivid and indelible brand upon the memory. There were two rooms, leading one from the other, and each was furnished, as the landlady put it, genteelly—a fact which increased rather than diminished the effect they produced upon Dorothy. For extreme misery, such as may be found in slums, for instance, has to the thinking mind an awful dignity, a grim character which appals but chastens the beholder. And even to the unintelligent the realism of the slum is unmistakable. We have reached the depths and we know it. From them we can look up, we cannot look down. If any change is possible, that change must be for the better. But in such rooms as Dorothy now found herself, everything, like the tenants, lacked character, had had character once, and had lost it irretrievably. Carpet, curtains, chairs, wardrobe, and bed were, so to speak, *déclassés*: pitiable to contemplate, the more so because they were carefully arranged with a smirking, forlorn, pathetic attempt to appear

better than they were. An arm-chair, obviously in an inconvenient position, had been placed where it stood to hide an inkstain upon the carpet. A small crack in the dull mirror over the chimneypiece was half hidden by a basket of wax flowers under a glass case. The curtains were looped back fantastically to conceal the faded folds in them. Japanese fans covered marks upon the wall paper. Garish bits of cheap lace and riband masked broken springs and bulging horsehair. Nothing matched. Every stick had been picked up here and there at sales. One horsehair chair had massive mahogany legs, and a noble width of seat. An alderman might—and possibly had—sat in it. The wardrobe, too, bought for a song because both panels of the door were cracked, had been in its day a *finé* piece of furniture. Brocades of exquisite texture might have hung in it; filmy laces and cambrics might have laid upon its once lavender-scented shelves. A marble-topped table displayed an ancient musical-box, a theatrical paper, and some faded daguerreotypes. In the centre of the mantelpiece, standing upon a Berlin wool mat, was a china clock of *biscuit* Sèvres, the dial encircled by nymphs and attendant *amorini*, a really charming bit, but chipped and broken. It was certain that the clock, which had recorded so many enchanting hours in other places, refused positively to record anything in Vauxhall Bridge Road. But beyond this dreary atmo-

sphere of what had been was the more terrible certainty of further abasement. Any change must be for the worse. Dorothy saw with absolute clarity of vision what rags would hang in the wardrobe, what men and women might sit in the aldermanic chair !

Once at home, however, Crystal recovered quickly from her condition of semi-collapse. Hitherto, she had accepted Dorothy's ministrations without protest, and perhaps without surprise, feeling—to use her own words—too much of a worm to resist. Now, the blood began to circulate more quickly, the look of slightly animal stupidity left her face, giving place to a dawning intelligence. She eyed Dorothy with increasing alertness. Then she said bluntly :

“ You asked me to tell you everything.”

“ Yes ; but if you are still too weak——”

“ I'm getting stronger every minute. Why do you want to know ? I shouldn't if I was you. I'd hold on to him, if I'd got him, as you have. The rest of the women in the world might go hang, for me. And how do you know I'm not going to tell you a lot of lies ? Why should you believe what I say ?”

Her voice rose, still harsh, with shrill derision in its tones.

“ I think you will tell me the truth.”

“ If I could get him back by telling lies, I'd tell 'em. But I don't think he ever cared *much*. He was grateful, that's all.”

"Grateful?"

"I stuck my knife into you then, didn't I? Why should Mr. Richard Gasgoyne be grateful to me? You want to know, and you shall know. When we met for the first time, he was starving——"

"Oh!"

"Ask him! Yes, starving. I fed him. We had our first meal together at my expense. He drinks champagne with you, I daresay; we had stout—a pint apiece. It's meat and drink, stout, when you're down on your luck. Dick was dead broke and green. My! But he'd grit, plenty of it. He might have crawled whining to some swell relations, but he didn't. Well, Dick told me that he was trying to make a living with his pen. He'd pawned everything he'd got, except what he stood up in, and his landlady had told him he needn't come back unless he brought his rent with him. Maybe you know all this?"

"He told me a part of it."

"But never mentioned me, I'll be bound."

Dorothy hesitated; then she said, "No."

"Not likely. Well, I," the pride in her voice flowed strongly; her fine eyes regained some of their fire, "I helped him out of his hole. I found him lodgings in the same house where I lodged; and I found him work: a set of articles about how girls like me live."

"Yes, 'Behind the Scenes,' I've read them. They were wonderfully well done."

"They were hot and hot out of the oven. All this time we were pals, you understand, nothing else. I was singing and dancing then, earning enough money to keep me just alive, not a ha'penny more, but I might have had my brougham and diamonds, too—for the asking. Believe that?"

"Yes."

"It's God's truth. I liked my work and I liked my independence. Then Dick fell ill; that was the winter before last. Did he tell you?"

"That he nearly died—yes."

"I nursed him. The doctor and I pulled him through. There wasn't a doubt of that. He was broke again, and very, very low, double pneumonia; I think he wanted to die; but I wouldn't let him. I tell you I fought for his life, and I won it—won it. Yes, I did. He can't deny it."

"I am quite sure he wouldn't."

"You're right, he wouldn't. And he was grateful. He saw how it was with me, and—and—you can guess the rest."

Silence fell upon the genteel room. Dorothy, unable to look at the speaker, stared helplessly at her surroundings. She could see no books, no needlework, none of those blessed trivialities wherewith lonely women distract their thoughts and cheat the leaden hours. She was beginning to understand why that fearful wild look had come into this unhappy

creature's face. And yet everything connected with this tragic story was subordinate to the man and her thought of him. From the first, she had said to herself: "I must be fair to Dick. I must not judge him till I know all."

After a tremendous pause, Dorothy said slowly, "I can guess part of the rest, but——"

"Ask any questions you like."

"You were innocent, till——"

"Innocent?" she laughed. "Did I say I was innocent? I told you I liked independence, not innocence. There was one other before Dick"—she clenched her hands, and a dull, resentful fire glowed in her eyes—"a brute of a manager. I was mad keen to get on to the stage—and I paid the price, as many another has paid it before."

"You poor girl!"

Some subtle intonation may have served to indicate Dorothy's merely self-conscious sense of relief. Crystal Wride said quickly:

"You'll forgive him?"

But Dorothy made no reply. It seemed incredible to reflect that she had parted from Gasgoyne barely two hours before, and that she was going to dine with him at eight the same evening.

"This happened the winter before last. After he got back his health," Crystal continued, "he began to make money. He used to say he'd found his market. We had good times—on the river——"

"On the river?"

"Yes. Rare larks. But we stuck to business. He had his job; I had mine. Then his paper sent him to Turkey, as you know."

"Yes, I know." Dorothy could hear Gasgoyne's voice, the unmistakable emphasis he had laid upon the gladness wherewith he had accepted the mission. "I was particularly keen to go," he had said, "because I was sick of London, sick of my life there." But she, the girl who had wrestled for that life, what of her?

"You had to part."

"Yes; it was awful, because when he went there was nothing left. He takes up a lot of room, does Dick. Of course, you've noticed that?"

Again her eyes played keenly, but with a certain furtiveness over Dorothy's pale, pain-twisted face. A physiognomist might have detected a flitting expression of cruelty—a cruelty not alien to jealousy. When Crystal had seen that Dorothy winced at her familiar use of Gasgoyne's Christian name, she had used it with unnecessary frequency.

"After he'd gone, the fog seemed to settle down thick, but I stuck to work, and saved money against his return. I took these rooms and waited."

Dorothy shuddered. Unconsciously the speaker had shown an astonishing tact in abstaining from details, in leaving the "waiting" to Dorothy's imagination.

"I suppose you had friends?"

"A girl or two. They don't count. Girl friends never did count with me. I never spoke to a man except to tell him to mind his own business," she added fiercely, "if that is what you mean."

"I did not mean that."

"I worried through the time, thinking of Dick. I used to sit in this chair for hours and hours, with my eyes half shut, seeing him. I'd a letter or two from him. He writes beautiful letters, as you know."

The "as you know" pierced deep. If the desire to kill had passed from the woman, the desire to wound remained.

"He came back last April after the war was over," said Dorothy, wishing to bring her torment to an end.

"On the fifteenth," said Crystal moodily. "He came in, kissed me, and sat down in your chair. You're not going to faint, are you?"

"No," said Dorothy.

She remembered Gasgoyne's allusion to pitch. Now, in some indescribable way, the pitch seemed to have touched her. She also had become part of this soiled, unfragrant, battered room. Dick had sat where she was sitting, had looked at the clock which had stopped for ever, and had wished, perhaps, that he had died outside Plevna. Again she heard his voice, when she asked the natural

question, "Weren't you glad to get back?" his odd glance aside, his half-nervous reply, "Oh, as to that, you know, I was not coming back, like some of the other fellows, to a cheery home."

To a cheery home? He had come back to this, crawled back to this, because nothing else was possible to a man with a spark of gratitude or decent feeling. She had fed him when he was starving, had nursed him, had loved him devotedly.

"We began again, but it wasn't quite the same. And we had rows, awful rows; I suppose I knew somehow that you was coming in sight. In May you arrived."

"And then——"

There was a pause. To Dorothy everything hung upon the answer to this question. Had Gasgoyne cast off this faithful creature with brutality, indifference, or with flimsy excuses? From her knowledge of him, she answered "No" to these charges. At any rate, Gasgoyne had come to the end of the road.

"He never spoke of you to me," continued the girl defiantly, "but I guessed that Miss Right had turned up, and it made me mad. While he was away I'd studied to improve myself. I worked hard; yes, I did. I daresay you've noticed that I speak like you do now, but when he came back he never noticed the change. Perhaps I was fool enough to hope that he might marry me some day. Bah!

I'll be maudlin in a minute. Anyway, we had another row—the last. I let myself go, I tell you, and he never said a word, not one. He sat where you're sitting, staring at that clock, just as you're staring at it now, and when I'd said my say, he got up, and went away. Mind you, I told him to clear out and never come back. He never did."

"But, surely——"

"He wrote a letter, offering to settle some money. It wasn't a bad letter; but I tore it up into tiny pieces and sent it back. Then I read the bit in the paper about his marriage to you. That knocked me out. Then I caught cold and lost my voice, and came jolly near to losing my billet at the Levity. All this time I was trying to find out where you lived. I went to a big house in Portman Square, and the flunkeys slammed the door in my face. Dick had changed his address. But I hung about the offices of his paper, and one afternoon followed him back to your house. Afterwards I watched him with you, more than once. To-day, when you two were spooning in the park, I was behind the bushes."

Dorothy groaned. Was nothing to be spared her? Was she also condemned to drink the lees of another's cup, to share every pang, to feel her heart stealing out in pity from the man she loved to the woman from whom she shrank, to feel also, with what futile resentment, with what shamefaced humiliation, that she was

sinking deeper and deeper into a slough of misery and despond which must needs engulf her for ever and ever ?

And as before, in her own room, the temptation assailed her with greater insistence and vehemence to wrench herself free from contamination, to shut eyes and ears to a misery she could not mitigate, to rise and go, and never to come back.

“You’ll forgive him, eh?”

The harsh voice acted as a sort of tonic ; its rasping astringent quality seemed to tighten resolution.

“I have not had time to think of myself or of him,” replied Dorothy hesitatingly.

“You will forgive him,” said the woman, and the jealousy in her voice, the yearning, moved Dorothy profoundly. “Some wouldn’t, I know. He’s no great catch for such as you, is Dick ; but you love him, don’t you ?”

They had risen, and were looking each into the other’s eyes. Dorothy’s cheeks flushed scarlet. That everything she held most sacred should be dragged in the mud, trampled in the gutter, soiled permanently, and that she should stand unresisting, unable even to protest, this palsied mind and body. She made no reply.

“You love him,” continued the other, “and you’ll marry him, and be the mother of his children——”

“In the name of pity——” entreated Dorothy.

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The coarse fibre of the actress failed to interpret these subtle vibrations.

"What are you making such a fuss about? You're not a schoolgirl. How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-one," said Dorothy, after a pause.

"Twenty-one? Oh, I see. Well, I'm a hundred and twenty-one. Now, look here, I was always one of the outspoken ones. I wanted to kill you, spoil your good looks, at any rate—not that you're a patch on me for them; but somehow you've had the best of me. In your quiet way you've come out on top. Well, good-bye. Get married! I shan't forbid the banns."

"What—are—you going to do?"

"Me?" She laughed derisively. "What price this little lot, eh? Who's bidding? Old Nick."

"Don't!"

"Why not? What is it to you?"

"Everything."

"Bah! Talk's cheap. What would you give to save my soul, my soul"—she laughed drearily—"which, like that old clock"—she indicated contemptuously the timepiece—"has ticked away its best days? Come—how much?"

She leaned forward, almost touching Dorothy's smooth pale cheeks, her eyes smouldering with derision and interrogation. Dorothy said nothing. What could she say? Yet she

faced the question, tried to answer it. Suppose a great sacrifice were demanded.

"How much?" mocked the other. "All your wedding presents?"

"Willingly."

"That would be nothing. Your friends would give you more. What else?"

She saw that Dorothy was attempting to solve the problem. At once her sense of the dramatic gripped her. She laid her hand upon Dorothy's arm, and in a harsh, penetrating voice evoked horrors.

"If, to-night, I went down to the river, and stood on Westminster Bridge, with nothing between me and the water except you——"

"Yes."

"Would you put off your marriage to save me?"

"No."

"I thought not."

"One moment. If I could think of a way. Oh, there must be a way! But it's not your threat of doing this dreadful thing which is driving me—no! If you jump into the river to-night, I shall marry Dick. Do you understand?"

"Not yet."

Dorothy considered, with her eyes upon the pale, passion-twisted face in front of her. Ought she to consult Dick? Then she said hesitatingly:

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"Dick and I must pay for the injury done to you. I'll speak to him."

Crystal laughed bitterly.

"This has got to be settled here and now. If I go back to my work and keep straight, will you put off your marriage for one little year? Yes—or no."

Again Dorothy hesitated. Although she was twenty-one, she was in some ways singularly young and inexperienced. A year did not seem to her a very long time. A year, moreover, would adjust her shattered sensibilities, heal her wounds. To marry Dick immediately seemed impossible.

"What is one little year to you?" whispered Crystal.

Dorothy seized her arm.

"Will you live straight?"

"Yes—I swear I will."

"Then I'll do what you ask. You hurt me just now, more than you will ever know, when you spoke of my future happiness. That happiness was very near a few hours ago; now it seems far away."

"You'll be happy enough soon."

"Not at your expense, not with the feeling, with—with the knowledge"—she fixed her eyes steadily upon the other's—"that you are going——"

"To hell. Out with it! How squeamish you swells are! Well, you're not a bad sort, and you mean what you say now; but

to-morrow——” She laughed drearily, not finishing her sentence.

“I shall feel just the same to-morrow.”

“I shan’t, thank the Lord!”

Dorothy shuddered. Crystal, pale and haggard, seemed to have collapsed. She lay back in her chair, but her eyes narrowed to a mere feline slit, glanced furtively at the girl Dick wanted to marry. A minute at least must have passed before Dorothy, leaning forward, said quietly :

“I know how you feel ; I can put myself in your place. You might live without Dick ; you have lived without Dick ; but you can’t live knowing that he belongs to me.”

Crystal nodded.

“You’ve hit it. I’ve seen starving kids flattening their noses against the cook-shop windows. The sight of other folks’ blessings has driven many a woman crazy.”

“I’ll help you ; I’ll do what I can to make things easier, but it will be hard for both of us.”

“You’ll chuck him at the last moment ?”

“If you promise to do what I ask.”

“Won’t he be wild ! And for a year, a whole year, you’ll have nothing to do with him ?”

“If you insist——”

“Why, what d’ye take me for ?” She laughed coarsely. “You and he mustn’t meet ; and—you mustn’t write.”

“I’m willing to pledge myself to that.”

Crystal smiled. Her brain, working slowly,

began to grasp the two sides of the situation. Salvation was presented as a mountain between Dick and a rival ; damnation destroyed not only herself, but this obstacle also.

"Done !" she said, with a harsh laugh. "I'll hang on a bit longer. Only I'd like to see his face when you tell him. He's accustomed to having his own way, is Dick."

She saw the shadows in Dorothy's eyes and misinterpreted their meaning.

"You'll weaken, maybe ?" she suggested.

"No."

"How am I to be sure of that ? And if you do weaken, if you do"—. She began to tremble, and then, controlling herself, added fiercely, "Suppose you've been playing with me ? Eh ? You're a woman, a girl, and he's a strong man. You'll be putty in his hands."

To her astonishment, she saw Dorothy's eyes wandering round the room, evidently in search of something.

"What do you want ?" she gasped.

"Paper, pen, and ink."

"Oh !"

She crossed the room, opened a battered bureau, and took from it writing materials.

"Going to write to him, are you ?"

"No."

Consumed with curiosity, the elder girl watched the younger. Dorothy chose a plain sheet of paper, and wrote a few lines upon it. These she read aloud :

"The marriage arranged between Mr. Richard Gasgoyne and Dorothy, daughter of the late George Fairfax, F.R.C.S., etc., has been indefinitely postponed."

Dorothy placed this and one of her cards in an envelope, which she directed to the editor of a morning paper.

"You can post it yourself," she said quietly.

They parted without more words. Crystal, indeed, stood agape with surprise; but when the front door had slammed, her frowning brow relaxed. She went to her bedroom, and examined herself in a looking-glass; then she glanced with longing at her bed, feeling, as she looked, dead-beat. The temptation to lie down, to rest aching limbs and head, assailed her. But if she failed to appear at the theatre, she would certainly lose her engagement, hanging already by a thread.

For a moment she hesitated; then, with a defiant smile upon her face, she began to repair, with paint and powder, the ravages of misery and madness. A few hours later, after the performance at the Levity, the stage-manager said to her:

"You're in your old form, I'm glad to see. Struck a bit of all-right, I daresay."

"I nearly did," replied Crystal; "but if you want the truth, the bit of all-right struck me instead."

CHAPTER III

PROTESTS

AFTER leaving Vauxhall Bridge Road Dorothy did not return at once to the Doll's House. She wished to prepare for the coming interview with Gasgoyne, to fortify herself with the tonic of movement and fresh air, to shake off, if it were possible, the stifling, clinging atmosphere of those shabby, soiled rooms into which she had walked a girl, out of which she came a woman. For the moment all human habitations were, so to speak, begrimed with soot and smoke. The large spaces of Hyde Park allured her because they reminded her of the clean country; she eyed the foot-passengers almost with hostility, as if they were trespassers. She wished passionately that she could be really alone in a vast prairie, breathing untainted air, seeing nothing but earth and sky.

Presently she found an empty bench and sat down. In the mid-distance sparkled the Serpentine; far away to her left she could see the sharp irregular outline of the roofs of the big houses in Park Lane; hard by, to her right,

was the Powder Magazine. She had passed it hundreds of times, had played as a child within a few yards of it, but till now its tremendous significance had escaped her notice. She surveyed its squat ugliness with dilating eyes. That it should be placed here, in the heart of a pleasaunce designed only for man's recreation and entertainment, seemed to her inevitable. What better spot could be found? As an object-lesson, however, its utility was impaired, because it never blew up. A violent explosion occurring unexpectedly at least once a year would be so natural and appropriate.

Such thoughts flitted through Dorothy's mind like bats dimly discerned in the twilight. She realised that in her an explosion had taken place, and she was unable as yet to determine the nature and extent of her injuries. With a curious sense of detachment, she began to think of its effect upon Gasgoyne. She had suffered laceration in silence; Gasgoyne would cry out. Already she could hear a soul-piercing protest. If she could spare him, if she could temper the terrible suddenness of it all, the indecent violence, how gladly she would do so, even if her own pain were doubled in intensity.

Perhaps, at this moment, anticipating the suffering of another, the maternal instinct burst from a merely dormant bud into full flower. She felt that she had become years older than her lover, that her love for him had

changed its aspect. The explosion, indeed, had shattered—temporarily, at any rate—her youth. It is not exaggeration to add that she felt a greater pity for Crystal and for Gasgoyne than for herself. Men, stricken to death upon the battlefield, have been known to minister to others but lightly wounded, oblivious of their own mortal injuries. In this sense of partial paralysis, Dorothy considered what she should say to Gasgoyne.

When she rose to return to her home and the lover now awaiting her there, it was nearly eight o'clock. The world was going out to dine. The hansoms flashed by, revealing laughing faces, wide expanses of shirt, shimmering satins, and filmy laces. Dorothy stared at the revellers in wonder. For the first time she felt herself to be an outsider, beyond the pale of these pleasure-seekers. And yet, without doubt, explosions had been in their lives. Their mirth, for the most part, was superficial, indicating nothing so much as the desire to conceal what lay beneath. In time, possibly in a day or two, she would join this procession as before, seemingly not the least joyous of the pilgrims, and make-believe with the best of them.

Susan Judkins told her that Mr. Gasgoyne was in the drawing-room.

"You're very late, Miss Dorothy."

"It doesn't matter," said Dorothy.

She went into the drawing-room, and closed

the door. Gasgoyne, who was reading the evening paper and glancing over an article of his own, rose to greet her with a glad exclamation. She let him kiss her, wondering if it were for the last time. Then he said, not crossly, but wonderingly, "How very late you are, Doll. Where have you been?"

She answered directly:

"In Vauxhall Bridge Road."

Afterwards she felt she had dealt him too sudden a blow. He stared at her intently, and repeated her phrase:

"In Vauxhall Bridge Road?"

"Yes; Crystal Wride saw the announcement of our marriage; she came here. I took her back in a cab; she told me everything: you understand—*everything*."

His brain leapt to a triumphant conclusion.

"You have forgiven me, my sweet Dorothy; you let me kiss you."

"I have forgiven you," she said dully.

"That you and she should have met," he muttered miserably. "Why did she come?"

"The poor unhappy creature wanted to hurt me."

"But she didn't?"

"Not in the sense you mean."

"Thank God! Doll, she helped me when I was starving; she nursed me; but I didn't abandon her. She drove me from her."

"I know. Dick, I have made a sort of bargain with her."

"What do you mean?"

"That is what I must tell you."

She told the story from beginning to end with simple dignity. Gasgoyne, leaning his head upon his hand, listened attentively, not interrupting by word or gesture. So he had listened to the other, in absolute silence; and at the end he had got up and had gone, without a word. Dorothy remembered this. With him, she reflected, silence indicated fear, not lack of speech. He might say nothing now, because of the danger of saying too much. When she had finished, he did get up, and she thought from his face and manner that he was about to leave her. Instead, he said, with seeming irrelevance:

"I have just been asked to lead an expedition into Central Africa. I refused, of course." He stared at her tentatively. She was too tired and muddled to understand him. Then, with an entire change of manner, speaking quickly and vehemently, he continued: "Doll, you have let Crystal get the better of you. I know her power; none better. You are about as fit to deal with her as a dove is with a cat. She is very clever and an amazing actress. Let us admit that I deserve punishment. But loving you, knowing that you love me, I protest against your punishment."

He closed his lips sharply, as if he were afraid to say more. Dorothy understood that much more could have been said, It was like

Dick, she reflected, to refuse to justify himself at the expense of the woman who had given to him so much. After a significant pause, Dorothy murmured:

"All the same, she—she loved you."

"Love! What a word to use. Oh, the ingenuity of this woman; she knows that my tongue is tied, and to you——" He broke off suddenly; when he continued his voice was steady again. "I don't excuse myself, and if you choose to take the line which some girls not fit to black your boots would take, if you break from me because of what I have been and done, I do not blame you; but you're too good and wise and kind."

"Dick, dear Dick, I must make the attempt. If I fail utterly, then, then——"

"Oh, yes; then the ban will be lifted. And in the meantime, we are to wait, to wait. Let me tell you that she'll keep us waiting."

"Dick, if you could look into my heart."

"I can, I do," he replied. "It is because of that I feel so helpless. You have tied yourself into knots which I know that I can't undo, and that you won't."

"Time may undo them."

"Time?" He regarded her keenly. "Time, you say? Ah, I see. Good and wise as you are, Doll, you have the instinct of your sex to sit on the fence whilst others fight for the possession of you. Hear me out! Time, eh? To a man there is no time save the present."

This is our hour, but you don't know it. You prefer to live in some shadowy future."

"Dick!"

"If I'm brutal, forgive me, but it's you I'm thinking of—you. I shall be busy enough in Africa——"

"Then you are going?"

"Yes, I am going, unless you say—Stay." Then he added explosively, "You think time will put things right, bring us together, to be happy for ever and ever. Doll, Time is not so kind as that. A year hence—who knows? We shall have changed. That is inevitable. If we come together, it will not be the same thing."

"Why not?"

"The experience of all the world is against it. From a mistaken sense of honour you are parting us."

"I have promised."

"You promised to marry me next Tuesday week. Look here, Doll; let me deal with Crystal." His voice grew persuasive.

"Let me deal with her," he repeated.

"No, no; it would be too cruel."

"Lay the facts before your friend, Lady Curragh. Come, let her arbitrate."

"Dick, how can I leave a point of conscience to another?"

Gasgoyne sighed. He saw clearly; and her vision was so blurred.

"All right," he said tenderly. "You are free."

"Free?"

"I mean, you dear angel, that you will do as you please, live where you please, associate with whom you please."

"And you?"

"I? Oh, I shall be bound to you always." Then, seeing her lips quiver, her eyes wet, he made his last appeal. Without warning, he took her into his arms, kissing her hair, her cheeks, her lips, with a passion more eloquent and overpowering than any words. At the end, he said entreatingly—

"Doll, am I to go or stay?"

"Oh, Dick, you break my heart; but you must go."

"God bless you!" he said; and went.

After he had gone, Solomon tried to comfort her. The sympathy in his eyes was unmistakable; although he knew that his mistress had acted with indiscreet haste. But dogs would not be the finest comrades in affliction if, like bipeds, they tried to staunch tears with words. When Dorothy cried, Solomon cuddled up close to her; but presently he jumped from her lap, and sat up, begging, entreating her to stop, because, in his opinion, she had wept enough. He whined and then barked sharply. Dorothy looked at him.

"You're right," she said. "I'm a fool to cry my eyes out; but oh, Solomon, I'm so miserable."

CHAPTER IV

ABYSMAL DIFFERENCES

WHAT tragedy has not its humours? When it became known in Portman Square that "poor dear Dorothy"—from the hour she left their house, the Helminghams invariably spoke of their niece with these qualifying adjectives—was not going to marry that adventurer, Richard Gasgoyne (already *en route* for Sierra Leone), Sir Augustus proclaimed the interference of Providence, and declared that he, for his part, was willing to overlook a regrettable incident. Lady Helmingham ordered her carriage and drove to Oakley Street.

"Why has this absurd marriage been broken off?"

"It has been—postponed," faltered Dorothy.

"Why, why? I insist, your uncle insists, upon knowing the truth. People are saying that you have been jilted."

"As if I cared."

Aunt Charlotte groaned.

"You ought to care; it is disgraceful not to care. And we, all of us, are in an embarrassing position. Everybody is chattering, and I have to—fib. Last night, the dear Duke of

Anglia— Oh! you are the most exasperating young person."

"I must be," said Dorothy meekly; then vehemently, she entreated: "Please, please don't ask any more questions." At her distress the good aunt melted.

"Very well. Only you must come home with me, my dear child. You are as white as a sheet. We'll go down into the country next week, and our fine air—and, perhaps, some cod-liver oil—and a little cheerful companionship——"

"You have always been too kind——"

"These things will happen," purred Aunt Charlotte. "Why, when I was about your age, I had an affair," the worthy dame sighed faintly, "with a charming young fellow whom I positively adored. He was in a line regiment, and in his uniform, I can assure you, that he looked—well, I have a daguerreotype, which I may show you some day. He jilted me—the wretch! And I cried my eyes out. But everything turned out for the best. Within a year I met your dear uncle. Shall I tell Susan Judkins to pack your boxes?"

"Aunt Charlotte, you mustn't think me ungrateful, but I must stay here. I must—I must."

"You mustn't, my dear, you really mustn't. Come, be reasonable."

"That's it. If only I were not reasonable, if I could feel and behave as Amy behaves."

The fond mother blinked, unable to believe her ears.

"You don't accuse Amy of being unreasonable, Dorothy?"

"She is a perfect dear," said Dorothy, hastily, "but the object of her life seems to be the study of your wishes, not her own."

"And what more natural?"

"To me it seems so unnatural. She is twenty years old, and apparently quite healthy, but the exercise she likes best is a two hours' drive every afternoon with you."

"Good gracious! You are certainly a most strange young woman."

"Dear Aunt Charlotte, I am sure I must be, if you say so, but don't you see that because I am such a stranger to you, it is better we should live apart?"

"The scandalous things that will be said——"

"As to that—pouf-f-f!"

"My dear, you should not say 'Pouf-f-f' to me."

"I say it to Mrs. Grundy, not to you."

In the end Lady Helmingham retired defeated. Then Sir Augustus wrote a letter in the spirit in which he ventured to hope it would be read by his dead sister's child. Dorothy cried over it and laughed over it, but she declined to go down into East Anglia.

Lady Curragh attempted to move this well-meaning but reckless young person from Oakley Street. As Moira Dunsany she had been

Dorothy's first and almost only great friend. After the death of George Fairfax, the girls saw but little of each other. Then Moira married Lord Curragh, and immediately captured a position in London society, which gradually became, so to speak, a sort of Gibraltar. Twenty years ago, it will be remembered, the married woman began to assert herself. The odious expression "professional beauty" was coined in those prehistoric times. The great American invasion had begun. The boldest of the bold among the young wives drove in hansoms, lunched and dined in restaurants, smoked cigarettes, and played poker. The old guard, headed by the early Victorian duchesses, predicted the end of all things, a *débâcle*; everybody else was enormously amused.

Moira Curragh had wit, high health, and an appetite for what she called the good things of life. Her Gibraltar, a snug house in Curzon Street, was held to be impregnable against the assaults of bores of whatever calibre. Very big guns indeed opened fire upon this small fortress; there were mining and countermining, frontal attacks and sorties, much sniping, and more than one case of treason within the garrison, but, in the end, the siege was raised.

To Moira Curragh Dorothy told her story. Being an Irishwoman and an optimist, Moira was strongly of opinion that things would come right. Gasgoyne would return from Africa

covered with glory; Crystal Wride, touched by Dorothy's self-sacrifice, would become a reformed character and marry, perhaps, a well-to-do tradesman; Dorothy's own wedding would transmute all the tears that had been shed into diamonds and rubies. Into this jam were popped a few grains of powder.

"Of course, you've behaved like a saint, but I feel most awfully sorry for your Dick."

"You think I ought——"

"Let us leave the oughts to the tabbies. Personally, I should have kept out of Pimlico."

"Pimlico came to Chelsea. In my place, you would have done what I did."

"I daresay. I generally do the wrong thing, although I say the right word. I say to you, 'Come to Homburg.' If you stop here when everybody is out of town you'll get horribly blue, and you'll forget how to laugh. By the time Romeo comes back, you'll be a fright."

"I shall stay here."

Not long after this, Lady Curragh saw Crystal Wride playing at the Levity. Next day she said to Dorothy:

"I've seen that girl; she has great talent; she's not likely to marry a greengrocer. How did Solomon receive her?"

"He tried to bite her, poor creature."

"Solomon is wiser than any of us. This woman meant to scratch your face, and I wish she had. But you chose to wear your heart upon your sleeve, and she was clever enough

to put her beak and claws into that, instead. Have you heard from Romeo?"

"No."

"You've written, of course?"

"No. You see, I promised her that for a year I would have no communication with him."

"Doll, what a heavenly fool you are!"

"If you think that I'm proud of myself, you are even a bigger fool than I am."

Shortly after this Lady Curragh went to Homburg.

During the dog days, Solomon, naturally enough, became rather cross. He hated Oakley Street and protested hourly against the heat and confinement of town life. Dorothy paid several visits to Vauxhall Bridge Road, but Solomon refused to accompany her. So she went alone. At first, Crystal assumed a slightly sullen, defiant manner; Dorothy knew that she had something to say, and not the ghost of a notion how to say it. Nevertheless, between the two girls stretched an attenuated thread of sympathy. And, presently, Crystal spoke. The stage-manager—omniscient, of course—had hinted at preferment.

"He says I'm too good for the Levity." Crystal imparted this information with an air of conscious pride.

"He'll get me a billet at one of the big theatres. With half a chance I'll show 'em

what I can do. I mean business, straight business, on and off the stage. I can sing, and dance, and act. Kate Vaughan can't do more, can she?"

"You are very ambitious."

"I'll get to the top, if I can. You make no error about that."

Dorothy divined the truth. Crystal had a will made of triple brass. She might climb high. If she became a star, would Dick be dazzled? This question shone in Crystal's eyes, rang in her voice. Because of Dick she meant "straight business." There was a pathos about her determination which brought tears to Dorothy's heart. By this time she had guessed that Crystal was very clever, although she displayed a subtlety, a finesse, in her intercourse with Dorothy, which Dorothy did not perceive or appreciate till afterwards. To give an instance: Crystal spoke often of her voice as true enough and strong enough to attract the groundlings, but quite untrained. Dorothy paid for a number of lessons, of which Crystal took every advantage. Dorothy reflected that she was doing penance. She was aware that Crystal had angled for a cheque; and she wrote it—you must understand—not in surrender to cupidity and acuteness, but in obedience to an ever-increasing desire to atone for what Gasgoyne had done and left undone. She admitted candidly that Crystal was entitled to great credit (being the woman she was), inas-

much as she had refused Dick's money. For Crystal loved money as a cat loves sardines. Dorothy took her out to dine, and discovered that she was greedy, and not ashamed of it. Upon the other hand, she exercised self-denial at home, because, as she pointed out, if there were "ups" in the "profesh," no member of it could wisely ignore the "downs." She exhibited genius in the making, and remaking, of the stage costumes, which she was expected to buy out of her small salary. Dorothy, after an inspection of the mahogany wardrobe, wrote another cheque. She wrote also a letter to Moira Curragh which explains motives in her own words:

"I am seeing a great deal of C.W., who interests me enormously, although I know that she delights in rubbing my fur the wrong way. She is intensely ambitious, and firmly believes that she lacks nothing except 'luck' to eclipse Kate Vaughan, who is her ideal. Also, she has really an elementary moral sense. She might advance quickly, if she were willing to do as the 'others' do. Of these 'others' I hear too much, for what they do and whom they do are a favourite subject of conversation. One is forced to the conclusion that a woman of that class, not so much immoral as unmoral, is certain to achieve a sort of success, and even a position if she makes the most of her opportunities. C.'s temptations are simply frightful. And she resists them valiantly. This, somehow,

appeals to me—and she knows it! I have given her money, but she is not grateful; or, perhaps, I should rather say, that her gratitude, to quote some wit whose name I have forgotten, is ‘a lively sense of further favours to come.’ But somewhere, hidden away, is a heart. Of that I have not a shadow of doubt. I have had a glimpse of it more than once.

“Often she hurls Dick’s name at my head. I try to duck, but she hits me every time, and smiles triumphantly. Yesterday she asked me point-blank if I had written to him, and this after my promise to her! I said, ‘No,’ with a feeble show of dignity; and she laughed in my face. I am sure she thinks that he and I are in constant communication. To my great relief she has secured a place in a country company. When she returns to town she will be given a small part at one of the big theatres; this is spoken of with gasping solemnity as the second rung on Fame’s ladder. I am leaving town also, and mean to bury myself with Susan and Solomon in the New Forest.”

Dorothy, indeed, for the first time in her life, had become possessed of an overpowering desire to be alone. Under other skies, she might, perhaps, be able to adjust, to arrange and classify, her disordered emotions and sensibilities. Lady Curragh replied to the letter we have just presented by entreating her friend to join her in Ireland, whither she had gone after the cure at Homburg.

"We face the bay of Donegal, and you can breathe the purest and most bracing air in the world. Doll, you are blue, and you'll be getting morbid if you go on prowling about Vauxhall Bridge Road. I can't help feeling that things have turned out for the best. Dick will become famous. Curragh says he is of the stuff that all successful men are made of. Do come here! We are such a cheery party."

But Dorothy declined this kind invitation, and others. Her cousin, Amy, wrote prettily from East Anglia, where the partridges had done quite too splendidly well, so dear papa said. A propos, that rather nice Lord Ipswich was coming to shoot. And Dorothy ought really to see the herbaceous border. And the Maltese cat had had kittens, such darlings! And there was a rather nice new baby at the vicarage. And mother sent fondest love.

Dorothy sighed as she read this simple epistle; for the moment she envied Amy, and wished that she could think everything and everybody "rather nice." Then, in reaction, she told herself positively that she would sooner spend a month with Crystal, even in Vauxhall Bridge Road, than a week with Amy at Helmingham Court. Crystal, with all her shortcomings, was strong, alert, vital, a woman. The other was only a caterpillar, crawling from one blade of grass to another.

Upon the eve of departure from town she

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learned a piece of news of importance. During the past six weeks she had been curiously sensible that Crystal was a creature of tempestuous moods : alternately optimist and pessimist, but always extreme : either triumphantly gay or despairingly miserable. That there was a physiological cause for this, Dorothy was too young and inexperienced to know or even to surmise. She had assigned these humours to a certain inherent strain of wildness bordering, in moments of stress, upon actual insanity. Now the true cause was revealed with appalling suddenness.

Dorothy never visited Crystal in the morning, which is a short cut to the conclusion that each knew the half of the other, for the afternoon girl may be—and generally is—an entirely different person from the early morning girl. Upon this particular occasion, Dorothy was obliged to call upon Crystal at nine—an hour when Vauxhall Bridge Road presents its most slovenly and out-of-elbows appearance. The landlady herself answered Dorothy's ring at the bell, and said tartly that her lodger was not up yet. A question or two revealed the fact that Crystal had eaten no breakfast, and was feeling "very low."

"Do you know what causes this depression?"

"No, I don't," replied the landlady.

"I shall go up," said Dorothy.

The woman eyed her with wrinkled

irritability. Then in a softer voice she muttered: "I wouldn't if I was you, Miss."

Dorothy went upstairs.

Crystal, half-clothed, was lying upon the bed, white and listless, but the sight of her spick-and-span visitor roused her. She sat up, trembling.

"Why have you come spying here?"

"Spying?"

"The door was open; I heard you ask that woman what was the matter."

"If anything is the matter, won't you let me help you?"

"You?"

She began to laugh.

"Stop that!" said Dorothy, with something of her father's authority; then, emboldened by the effect of her words, she added sharply, "What is the matter? Tell me at once."

At these peremptory words Crystal opened her eyes, and her lips parted, while a wave of colour rushed into her pale cheeks. Then she smiled slowly, with a subtle expression, compounded—so it seemed to Dorothy—of triumph, derision, and distress.

"All right. Only you must swear that you won't tell Dick. Swear!"

"I swear."

"Bend down your head. I'll whisper it."

"Oh!" said Dorothy faintly, when the other had whispered half a dozen words. She shrank back from the bed, the colour ebbing

and flowing in her cheeks also, her eyes dilating.

"Thought you'd squeal," said Crystal contemptuously. "Now you can go."

Dorothy sat down struggling with her feelings. Civil war was raging in both head and heart. Crystal watched her through half-closed lids, the same smile upon her lips. Presently Dorothy controlled herself sufficiently to say, "You knew of this when you first came to me."

"Yes."

"That is why you wanted to, to——"

"To kill myself and it—yes."

"And you never told Dick?"

"I didn't know till after he'd left me."

An interminable, unendurable silence followed. Finally pity drove everything else out of Dorothy's heart. With her imagination she was able to supply details—the shock of surprise, the horror, the anguish, the madness. She tried to see herself in a like position, she tried to picture (and failed) her cousin Amy, Moira Curragh, other girls of her own age, who had been delicately and tenderly nurtured from the hour each was born. Why, between human beings should such an abysmal gulf have been fixed? Across an ocean of innumerable differences of convention, association, environment, Dorothy gazed upon the woman who was destined to be the mother of Dick's child.

Hours seemed to have passed, when she stammered out, "You must let Dick know."

"Not yet," said Crystal. "I'm not quite such a fool as that. You seem to know a fat lot about men."

The sneer hardly touched Dorothy, although the fact penetrated. She told herself that her knowledge of men was indeed thin. And yet, surely Dick would wish to be told, would claim the right to succour, would play his part (if it were necessary to play a part), would do his duty. Something of this, feebly expressed, escaped her.

"You don't think he'd come back to me, do you? Not he. I'd be ashamed of him if he did. But when he does come back, I shall be all right again and playing leading parts."

Her pride rang out unmistakably—the pride of the actress. Then, in an entirely different tone, she continued: "Now you see why I've screwed every ha'penny out of you I could get, why I made you promise not to write to him—and I knew you were the sort to keep the promise. If he'd married you, I would have killed myself. But he's free, and when he comes back to find me where I ought to be, why then—— But I won't rub it in. What a beast you must think me. For you're a good sort. When I'm not hating you, I love you. If you were anybody else I'd worship you, but I've had to fight for my own hand. Now you'd better get out of this. We sha'n't meet again.

You're a sight too good for Dick or any other man I've known. And you've saved two lives; the kid's may be worth little, but mine—who knows?"

Her voice had rung changes on all the emotions. Pride, scorn, pathos, misery, and at the end, with the last two words—triumph. Dorothy wondered whether the speaker was weaving ropes out of sand. If she became the greatest actress of her generation, if her child were a cherub of loveliness, would Gasgoyne change?

"Are you going?"

"Not till you tell me your plans."

"My plans? I shall stick to my job as long as I can. I've money put by, thanks to you. I'm strong and hopeful. It's only when I'm overtired at rehearsals that I get blue. To-day I was miserable. I lay here, feeling horrid, and thinking that I'd lose my billet, lose my looks, lose everything. See?"

"I see. But you're better already."

"I'm quite myself. I shall eat a bit of breakfast. I have treated you vilely, but even that can't take away my appetite. Hit me, if you like. I won't hit back. Only, for God's sake, say something—anything."

"If you wish me to say 'Good-bye'——"

"You make me feel a worm." She writhed in the bed, unable to bear the forgiveness and pity in Dorothy's eyes.

"Before I go, tell me when you expect——"

"Oh, about the middle of January. Why?"

"I shall come to you, if you will have me?"

"You?"

"Yes, you must have somebody. I should like to come."

"To see me suffer?—No, no, I don't mean that, Miss Fairfax. That is the nastiest thing I ever said. I take it back. Come to me, will you? Well, look here. I don't want to see you again. I shall see your face, as I see it now, as long as I live; it'll haunt me; yes, it will. But I hold you to your bargain. For one year, as long as I keep straight, you won't marry Dick, and you won't write to him or see him?"

"That is understood," said Dorothy coldly. She turned to leave the room, glad to think that she would never enter it again; and yet, in some strange way, sorry for its inmate, who lived not in it at all, but in some enchanted palace of her imagination, built of nothing more substantial than a fond woman's hopes.

"Yes, you'll stick to that, I know."

She spoke admiringly, but grudgingly, possibly contrasting her own code of honour with Dorothy's.

"Good-bye," said Dorothy gently. She came back to the bed, and held out her hand. "Remember, Crystal, if you should want me, I'll come."

"Why should I want you?"

"I daresay you will get along capitally without me. Indeed, I'm sure you will."

"That's not true. At this moment you're sorrier for me than ever, and why?" She asked the question fiercely. "I shall go to a place I know of in France. They think nothing of these little mistakes over there. I tell you I'm all right—all right. And I've plenty of pluck, too. Do you take me for a funk?"

In her large eyes Dorothy saw fear, but she answered hopefully :

"You have splendid health. Why should you be afraid?"

"I'm not afraid. I can hold my own with any woman, and I shall, too."

"Of course."

"There's no 'of course' about it. Some girls would be terrified, miserable, broken-hearted. I'm not that kind, even if I did play the baby this morning."

The tears stood in Dorothy's eyes, but she held them back. In silence she stretched out her hand. To her amazement, the strange creature in the bed seized it, kissed it, held it to her bosom, and then flung it away with a laugh.

"If I hadn't kissed it, I should have bitten it," she declared. "I do hate you worse than ever, because you make me feel such a beast."

For answer Dorothy bent down.

"You don't hate me," she whispered, "and you're not a beast. I admire you, because I

know how you feel exactly. You can't deceive me, Crystal, but it is plucky indeed of you to try. And whatever happens, I am your friend. I go now only because you send me away. When you want me, I shall come back. Perhaps you will write; let me know how you get on in the new company. I shall write to you. Crystal, you have taught me more than I ever knew before."

With that she kissed her.

"It isn't much wonder Dick left me for you," Crystal sobbed. "Well, you've downed me. I swore you shouldn't, but you have."



CHAPTER V

YOU HEAVENLY FOOL!

DOROTHY let the Doll's House for a year, and spent the next few months in Hampshire. Solomon and Susan Judkins kept her company, not to mention certain famous authors and composers, both French and English. Afterwards, Dorothy spoke of this three months as a rest cure. Perhaps she was affected by the sylvan atmosphere. The soft, languorous air, the placid trees, the silence—these cast a spell upon a tired, perplexed brain. "Poppy and mandragora" grew in this New Forest, which is so very old. And here autumn possesses a peculiar charm. All things seem to be enveloped in a golden haze. The year grows old beautifully, without heart-breaking evidence of pain and decay. It does not die; it falls asleep. Even Solomon, that epitome of superabundant energy, was content to lie by his mistress's side, blinking in the mellow sunshine, content to let the serene hours glide past.

Each day, however, this tranquil existence suffered an intermittence of disturbance.

Letters came to Dorothy. It is significant that Solomon barked at the postman, and upon one never-to-be-forgotten occasion pinched his leg.

One letter carried an outlandish stamp, and was addressed, "Solomon, care of Miss Fairfax."

Dorothy knew that Gasgoyne had written it. "Shall I burn it, Solomon?"

Solomon protested against this. He detested letters, but there were exceptions. He would be very glad to hear what his friend Dick Gasgoyne had to say.

"But, Solomon, you know that I ought not to read this."

Solomon sat up, put his head on one side, and winked his eye. He was not a good person according to Helmingham authority.

"Oh, Solomon, how can you?"

The tyke winked again. He knew, none better, the value of judicious silence.

"Solomon, I must read this letter to you. Oh, how wicked we all are!"

"Wouf-f-f!" said Solomon, in profound disgust. Then, as Dorothy, violently blushing, broke the seal, he scampered round her, barking joyously. Having done this, he sat up again, with his head attentively inclined, and a diabolical grin upon his naughty face.

"Dear Solomon" (Gasgoyne wrote), "I have heard from Lady Curragh, so I send you

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through her this line to say that I'm very fit. Solomon, I know you know that I have been a fool, and loyal as you are to Dorothy, I am sure in your heart you put her down as not nearly so wise as she ought to be, after having lived so long with you."

"Good gracious!" said Dorothy, breaking off, and speaking in a tone of acute distress, "I ought not to go on. I thought this was just a message to you, Solomon, that Dick would tell you how he was, but this——"

Solomon growled. If ever a tyke displayed intense irritability he did. The scorn in his eye was terrible to behold. He held that it is better to do the wrong thing the right way than the right thing the wrong way. Having opened the letter, having read half of it, who but a woman with an absurd conscience would halt and stammer and blush and waste valuable time.

"Wouf-f-f!" he snorted.

"Solomon, you are a devil."

He grinned more impudently than ever. He knew that if he ran out of sight she would kiss the letter. Dorothy sighed deeply, struggled against the flood of temptation, and then sank.

"Dear old Solomon" (Dick continued), "you must tell Dorothy that a promise wrung from another at the point of the sword is no promise at all. I simply can't stand Doll's silence any longer. You must persuade her to write to me, so that I shall get the letter the first thing

on my return. If Dorothy does not write, I shall believe that she has not forgiven me."

"Oh, oh!" murmured Dorothy, breaking down. "How cruel of him to say that."

Solomon licked her hand in sympathy, but his eyes sparkled. Every individual hair upon his head quivered with excitement. Would Dorothy write?

For two days after this, the quiet glades, the silent trees, the kindly faces of the foresters, seemed to mock Dorothy. But she did not write to Gasgoyne. Or, rather, she did write in a moment of black despair, and then, in reaction, destroyed the letter. How often, in the years to come, she speculated upon what would have happened if that letter had been despatched!

Meantime, she had heard twice from Crystal, who wrote of a stroke of luck. Her salary was raised; the manager spoke of a permanent engagement in town.

Between the lines of this Dorothy read emotions other than those of jubilation. The time was rapidly approaching when Crystal must leave the company and sit down alone, without occupation or distraction, to wait for her trouble. This thought also darkened Dorothy's horizon, and cast shadows across the pleasant paths down which she strolled.

But, in her heart, notwithstanding what had passed, dwelt faith and hope in the future. Dick would soon come back. Meantime she

gave herself up to her books and to the sweet relaxation of the dream-life wherein she found happiness and repose.

"Dick will have so much to tell us," she confided to Solomon, "we must have something to tell him."

At this Solomon looked rather solemn. He knew his own sex; and the knowledge worried him. Dick had said that he couldn't stand silence. And Solomon knew Dick's weakness, the weakness of so many strong men who have been as wax in the hands of beautiful women. If Dick, athirst for kind words, found them upon other lips, what then? Solomon growled to himself, and Dorothy, hearing him, supposed he was suffering from bad dreams. But Solomon was wide-awake, and, for the moment, as unhappy a tyke as could be found in the kingdom.

On Christmas Day a telegram came from Crystal at Saint-Malo.

"I am desperately ill; please come to me."

Dorothy started alone within a couple of hours.

She crossed to Saint-Malo from Southampton in a storm. All night long the vessel struggled gallantly against wind and roaring waves. To sleep in such an inferno was out of the question. Dorothy wedged herself into her berth with pillows, and, like the apostle, waited for the day. She was an excellent sailor, and the terrible pitching and tossing affected her spirit

only. She became obsessed with the idea that Crystal was battling for her life, even as the ship battled with the waves and wind. Every groan from the stout oak timbers seemed to come from Crystal; the quivering of the vessel under the shock of tons of water falling upon her decks, the convulsive spasm with which she righted herself after each attack, the odd intermittences of silence and tranquillity always so impressive when a tempest is raging—these things made her shudder with apprehension. After passing the Channel Islands, wind and water abated their violence. Dorothy went on deck. The sky, in the early morning's light, was almost black and amber. The land was of a pale green-grey, as if the storm had washed all colour out of the Côte d'Émeraude. Then came the tedious delay in docking, the passage through the Custom House, and, at last, release from bondage.

Nine o'clock was striking as Dorothy drove to the address that had been written upon the telegram. A *religieuse* opened the door.

"Is she better?" faltered Dorothy.

"She is very ill—dying, I think," said the Sister. Then she added calmly, as if pre-occupied with thoughts concerning the life beyond, "All the same, the doctor does not despair."

The doctor, a prim, precise, spectacled little man, received Dorothy in a dismal, conventional sitting-room. A gesture of the white

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plump hands conveyed the assurance that all that was possible had been done, and that the issue lay with Providence.

"She is unconscious," he added.

"And the child?"

The doctor's face brightened. The child was alive and a really splendid little fellow. Unhappily, the mother from the first had taken no interest in him.

"Can I go to her?" Dorothy asked.

The little man led the way upstairs into a not uncomfortable bedroom, overlooking the harbour, now filled with the big fishing boats that sail in February to Newfoundland and Iceland.

"I can do nothing," whispered the doctor; "but I will return presently. Sister Claire has my instructions."

Dorothy then saw the sister, half effaced by a curtain, sitting by the window. Her lips were moving slightly, repeating some office. Dorothy entered the room and crossed to the bed. Crystal lay upon her back with her eyes closed, apparently fast asleep. A faint smile seemed to rest upon the lips; her hair, twisted into a great braid, showed golden tints against the dead white of the night-dress; the thick curling lashes gleamed upon her cheek; from her folded hands came a flash of metal. Dorothy saw that she wore a wedding ring.

"Oh, you poor thing!" she reflected.

Her first feeling—or, shall we say the first conscious and memorable reflection?—was one of wonder and incredulity that Crystal should be dying! Dorothy could see her dancing at the Levity, the symbol of life, colour, movement—and now sinking to rest for ever.

And with her would perish those airy sprites of hope and fancy, those innumerable ambitions to rise, to outshine other stars, to play her part as mime with such art that he who had never truly loved her might fall at her feet—dazzled, conquered.

Dorothy knelt down beside the bed. The pathos of what had been, its inevitableness, its irony, its effect upon her own life, overpowered her. Crystal lay upon that poor bed, the type of a million unfortunate women whose sins may be forgiven because they have loved much. By the grace of God Dorothy herself had been protected from such a fate. But she knew, in all humility, that, stripped of a tender and inspiring upbringing, without a wise father's love, without the ministrations of faithful servants and teachers, lacking the example of worthy friends, she too might have been as Crystal Wride. And her tears flowed for the innumerable girls, like Crystal, alone and adrift upon wild waters.

Presently, she was able to pray for the repose of this passing soul. Prayer brought peace: the conviction that it was well with the sinner, that suffering had purged her, that a greater suffer-

ing than any fleshly anguish, the agony of disappointment, had been mercifully withheld. Then, rising from her knees, she gazed upon the face from which she had shrunk at first in loathing, to which she had turned in pity, the face which at last she had kissed. What strange bond had linked them together? What power had been thus triumphant in destroying seemingly indestructible barriers?

At this moment it seemed to Dorothy that what true knowledge of her fellow-creatures might be hers, she owed to Crystal Wride, who had torn a film from her eyes. The laceration had not yet healed; she saw dimly still, but she saw, and she knew that if Crystal had not come into her life, she might have remained blind to the end of her days.

As she gazed at that still white face the eyes opened.

"I have come to you," said Dorothy.

She bent down and kissed the forehead, now slightly wrinkled with interrogation. She felt sure that Crystal recognised her, but her white lips remained closed. At that moment Dorothy heard a faint cry—the unmistakable wail of a newly born infant. The cry rose in a piteous crescendo and died away. It seemed to Dorothy that the child was calling the mother back from the other world, proclaiming with its puny voice the incontestable rights of the living paramount over those of Death.

Dorothy said eagerly:

"Crystal, you must live; do you hear me? Your baby wants you."

The white lips trembled and moved. Dorothy caught a faint whisper.

"It is not dead, then?"

Before she answered a derisive smile flickered across Crystal's face and vanished. Dorothy knew then, perhaps for the first time, that the child had quickened no love in the mother's heart. And she knew also that Crystal, with her amazingly acute perceptions, had divined this.

Meantime, Sister Claire had risen from her chair, and, hearing Crystal's voice, crossed to the bed and laid her finger upon her patient's wrist. Dorothy, watching her placid, pleasant face, saw a dawning of hope illuminating the smooth, colourless skin. She nodded to Dorothy, and with a polite gesture invited, rather than commanded, her to leave the room.

Before twenty-four hours more had passed the doctor spoke guardedly of a possible recovery.

"She was sinking, and you aroused her. It is—extraordinary, but I have seen it happen again and again in such cases."

Then, with Gallic fluency tempered by the constraint of a bachelor talking to a young English "Mees," he continued:

"It is odd, is it not? but Madame takes no interest whatever in the child, and such

a child—superb. I have made arrangements with an excellent creature from Dinan, who arrives to-morrow.”

“Thank you,” said Dorothy. Then, after a moment’s pause and with a faint blush, which the Frenchman quite misinterpreted, she added: “The father, who is a friend of mine and in Africa, would wish all that is possible to be done.”

The excellent creature, a-flutter with ribbons and beaming with smiles, duly arrived, and declared instantly that the baby was adorable. From that moment the fretful cries ceased. Dorothy told herself that from the baby’s point of view all was well for the next few months.

Satisfied that Dick’s child was properly cared for, Dorothy confined her ministrations to the mother, whose strength returned almost as rapidly as it had left her.

“You saved my life,” said Crystal.

“That is really nonsense.”

“It’s the truth. You looked at me as if you thought I was dying, and that made me want to live.”

“I looked at you like that?”

“Yes, you did. I don’t say you wer’n’t sorry, mind you, but you must have been feeling that it was really the very best thing I could do.”

“I was praying that you might live,” replied Dorothy steadily.

During the first days of recovery, Dorothy, obeying the doctor's instructions, made no mention of the child.

"It is my good fortune to understand what is left unsaid," he explained to Dorothy, whom from the first he treated with almost exaggerated respect. "This little one was not exactly welcome, *hein?* That jumps to the eye. And Madame is an *artiste*. She told me so, but—name of a name!—I knew that when I saw her. The type is unmistakable. Well, talk to her of her art, of future triumphs. But leave the little one in the arms of the *nourrice*, where he is absolutely at home."

Finally, Crystal herself spoke of her plans for the baby's future.

"I shall leave him in France," she declared, not without an inflexion of defiance. "How can I possibly take him back to England? I have a good engagement. I am going to play a very minor part, but I understudy Miss Gwendolen Bostock, and she has something wrong with her throat. My great chance is coming. Heard anything from Dick?"

Dorothy wondered whether she betrayed any confusion as she answered quietly: "He wrote to a friend of mine from Sierra Leone. He was quite well and in high spirits. We shall hear nothing for six months."

"A lot may happen in six months," said Crystal.

Ultimately the child was left in his foster-mother's charge. But it was Dorothy, not Crystal, who paid a visit to Dinan, and satisfied herself that the small farm was situated upon a breezy hilltop, and that the other children scampering about were models of health and strength. And after Crystal had returned to the stage Dorothy spent several weeks at Dinan, sketching and botanising, so she said; but the good people at the farm might have accounted otherwise for her expenditure of time.

Susan Judkins, who with Solomon had crossed the Channel, protested vehemently, being of the opinion that her young mistress had behaved indiscreetly, and also foolishly.

"I've nothing against your going to see the baby, Miss Dorothy; but it's this hole-in-the-corner way of doing it that upsets me. Not a word to her ladyship or anybody else, and me sworn to hold my tongue, not that I ever was a tattler. Already some hateful folk is saying it's yours."

"Rubbish!" said Dorothy, with her chin in the air. But in a softer tone she explained: "You know, Susan, I am thinking of Mr. Dick's good name. If I told my own people anything, I should have to tell them everything, and he is so far away, unable to defend himself."

"Let's hope he'll be back soon," said Susan grimly.

An incident followed that more than justified Susan's protest. Dorothy was stopping *en pension* at the Hôtel Victoria in Dinan, that pleasant inn facing the Place Bertrand du Guesclin. One day a party arrived from Dinard, some fashionable folk quite indifferent to the glories of Gothic architecture, but with appetites inordinately whetted for gossip. Amongst them was a certain Mrs. Pilkington-Browne, who had known Dorothy slightly both in East Anglia and Portman Square. This lady greeted Dorothy with effusion at *déjeuner*; but later, when Dorothy happened to be talking to Miss Pilkington-Browne, a prim, pretty little girl of sixteen, the mother beckoned her away, and later, on departure, took leave of Dorothy with almost insolent words and manner.

"You know, my dear Miss Fairfax, now that the season is beginning you will find more Britons than Bretons in this part of the world. Good-bye. So glad to have had this glimpse of you. We all wondered what on earth had become of you."

Afterwards Dorothy knew that she ought to have seized this opportunity. Mrs. Pilkington-Browne was not particularly ill-natured, and, taken into confidence, would probably have held her tongue, and perhaps, if necessary, championed an indiscreet young woman against

the inevitable consequences of her indiscretion. But the incident happened during those dark and dreadful days when she was hourly expecting news of Dick, and when, alas! no news came.

However, she left Dinan, and made a pilgrimage to Paimpol. Pierre Loti's enchanting story, *Pêcheur d'Islande*, had just appeared, and Dorothy read every line of it again and again with sensibilities quickened to the most intense sympathy and pity. Gaud had waited for Yann, as she was waiting for Dick—and Yann had not come back!

Under the mysterious spell of the country, she attended certain Pardons, and in particular the one of Our Lady of Good News, to which flock the mothers and maids whose sons and lovers are far away. Dorothy talked to many of the women, many of whom had waited, as Gaud waited—had watched through long autumn days for a distant sail upon the horizon which never fluttered into sight.

"So many remain over there," sighed one girl. "It is the will of God, mademoiselle; but, oh! it is hard on us women."

Dorothy wandered into many of the cemeteries, irresistibly attracted to those rude wooden crosses with the roughly carved inscription: "Lost at Sea."

During these sad weeks, the English press was unanimous in its verdict that Richard

Gasgoyne would never be seen again in Fleet Street. Nor was this a matter of mere surmise. Proofs accumulated bit by bit. One or two natives returned to Sierra Leone to tell a shocking story of suffering and hardship. Nevertheless, Dorothy told Susan that Dick was alive, and Susan, let it be added, partly out of pity, partly from faith in youth and strength, fortified her mistress's conviction.

"Mr. Dick 'll take a lot of killing," she declared.

Finally, a long letter arrived from Crystal, curiously compounded of triumph, misery, and self-justification. Miss Gwendolen Bostock, it appeared, had lost her voice and her position as leading lady. Crystal, suddenly called upon to perform a great part, had played it with such fire and cleverness that the management had secured her services at a large salary. Clippings were enclosed, none too clean, to be returned—so ran an underlined postscript—when read. The rest of the letter must be given in its entirety.

"Dick is dead. I've made up my mind to that. It nearly killed me, but I went on acting all the same. And I never played so well in my life either. Everybody said so. Some of the women in the stalls, whose complexions won't stand that sort of thing, howled over my pathetic bits."

Dorothy laid aside the letter for a moment.

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Owen Meredith's lines had come into her head:

*Taking the past to give pathos
To the little new song that she sings.*

When she picked up the letter, it was with a conviction that, to Crystal at any rate, the death of Dick was a lesser thing than the triumph of making fashionable ladies howl!

"And now," continued Crystal, "I may as well tell you that I've made arrangements to place the baby in a sort of Institution for Little Mistakes near Paris. I have paid a lump sum down, and the child will get a good education, and later I shall furnish the cash for giving him a proper start. But he'll never know I'm his mother. I'm running straight, and it pays. I mean my name to be as clean as any woman's in the kingdom. I owe you a lot for what you did, and at any time when you want stalls for any show in which I'm playing, you write to me. . . ."

There was more, not worth recording; but near the lines where Dick's name occurred Dorothy saw two tear-marks. Because of these she judged the writer with charity, although the abandonment of the child filled her with resentment and dismay. That Dick's son should be brought up, as Susan put it, a *fondling*, stirred her to the marrow.

After two sleepless nights she told her faithful handmaiden that they must return to Dinan.

"Whatever are you going to do, miss?" asked Susan.

"I don't know yet," Dorothy replied.

At Dinan, the excellent creature, no longer a-flutter with ribbons and beaming with smiles, told a harrowing tale. Acting under Madame's orders, she had taken the adorable little one to Paris, and left him there—in prison (*en cellule*!).

Dorothy, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes, listened to details about the grim, white-washed building, the austere sisterhood, the bare, rigorously scrubbed wards, the tiny captives cast up by an implacable sea, left nameless and forlorn to live under an iron discipline.

"And, look you," sobbed Dorothy's informant, "if I were not poor as a sparrow, if I had not so many mouths to fill, I and my good Alcibiade would adopt the little one. Mademoiselle, he is a masterpiece! Never, never, shall I see such a baby again, so strong, so beautiful!"

The kind soul dissolved deplorably, murmuring an apostrophe to her patron saint.

Dorothy tried to comfort her, kissed her firm red cheeks, and exhibited a present—a rosary of beads fashioned out of wood from the Mount of Olives, and blessed by a Prince of the Church at Sainte Anne d'Auray.

"Mademoiselle, you are an angel. Why—why did not the good God see to it that you were the mother of the little one?"

Dorothy went away with the address of the Institution for Little Mistakes in her pocket. Susan grumbled, as she packed up that night, because Dorothy seemed to be stricken suddenly dumb.

You will guess the reason of this. Her mind was made up, and Susan's protests, no more to be dammed than a river in spate, would have been so exasperatingly futile. They travelled to Paris the next day.

Upon the following afternoon Dorothy appeared at the small hotel where she was staying with an expression not to be interpreted by Susan. Resolution, obstinacy, and triumph informed the young lady's face.

"Have you nothing to tell me, miss?"

"Nothing yet, Susan."

"You've been to see the child, of course. Is he well?"

"I never saw such a baby in my life," Dorothy replied solemnly.

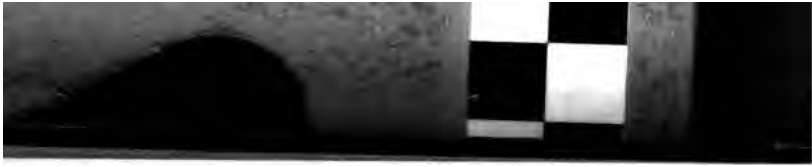
A week later Susan's curiosity was satisfied, and her sense of what was fitting almost unrecognisably crushed. Dorothy brought home the masterpiece in a brand new perambulator!

"He's mine now," she said calmly.

"Heavens preserve us!" exclaimed Susan.

"If the fittest survive," said Dorothy with emphasis, "this baby ought to live for ever."

Then, very concisely—for she had acquired the habit of thinking before she spoke—the



facts were recited. Dorothy had offered to adopt and provide for the child upon the condition that her name was kept secret from Crystal. The Mother Superior herself had suggested this as not only the ordinary but the essentially right thing to do.

"We have had great trouble," she said, with a world-embracing gesture. "Mothers permit other women to adopt their babies, and then later, perhaps, they want them back again. We must obtain the consent of Madame Wride naturally, but we shall tell her that a lady wishing to adopt a child has selected her baby. Also, you must satisfy us that you are in a position to take care of the little one. For the rest, such arrangements are made every day. And we would prefer infinitely, you understand, that Madame Wride should not know your name. Undoubtedly she will infer that it is a Frenchwoman and not a compatriot who wishes to adopt the child."

Crystal's consent to the arrangement came by return of post. One may guess, perhaps, that the placing of Dick's son in the Institution of Little Mistakes had caused the actress qualms of conscience. Now, apparently, he was to be brought up as a gentleman; for the Mother Superior, ravished (as she expressed herself) by Dorothy's face and French accent, had spoken enthusiastically of the little one's amazing good fortune.

Susan listened agape with consternation to



this, and much more. It was quite obvious that Dorothy still believed in Dick's return.

"But if he don't come back, Miss Dorothy——?"

"Then this is all that I shall have left of the man I love."

So speaking, she kissed the child.

"You'll write to her ladyship?" muttered Susan.

"Not yet."

"Well, what's done is done," said Susan desperately. "But to stop evil tongues, I'm willing you should tell 'em that it belongs to—me."

"Oh, Susan!"

Dorothy began to laugh; the baby crowed joyously.

"You can call it my grandchild," Susan said with dignity. "These Frenchies can think what they like of me."

Accordingly, not even to Moira Curragh was mention made of this baby, who throve apace from the beginning. Never was seen a handsomer boy. He had come into the world by a by-path; a king's son, upon the king's highway, could not have been healthier or happier than this obscure creature. He was baptized George, after Dorothy's father. His birth was duly recorded at Saint-Malo, the crude fact hastily written down and forgotten as soon as written. The parson who baptized him, the doctor who registered his birth—both busy,

overworked men—forgot his existence long before he was short-coated.

It is significant that from the first the baby adored Dorothy. In her arms, he lay quiet; when in others, he howled lustily. He crowed always at sight of her, and reached out white dimpled fists.

If she struggled against this never-ending wooing, this subtle enticement, nobody but herself was aware of that struggle. Dorothy began to tell herself that baby was all Dick, that from top to toe he was his father's son. The child clawed at her bosom and at her heart-strings. With divine audacity he demanded love—love unstinted; and the inordinate demand created the supply. And Dorothy was no niggard. When she gave love or friendship she never measured it.

"I love you," she whispered in the tiny pink ear. "I love you to distraction."

Solomon gave Susan to understand that his nose was out of joint. One day he found a filmy veil beside an empty perambulator. He tore it viciously to pieces!

This happened three months later, when spring was abroad in Brittany. No word had come from Dick. Each day, as the postman swung into sight, carrying his stout leather bag, Dorothy would feel a lump in her throat, a weakening of the knees, a quiver of excitement. Then, after a decent interval, Susan Judkins would appear, with a careless, "Any

news this morning, Miss Dorothy?" Dorothy would shake her head, and Susan would return to her work with a tightening of her thin lips and the mournful expression of the confirmed pessimist.

Three more months passed; then a bolt fell. Richard Gasgoyne had perished. A white man staggered into Sierra Leone to die. Before he died he described an attack upon the expedition, the massacre of his companions, and his own escape and subsequent sufferings. There were a few lines in the papers: short obituary notices of a young man of brilliant promise. A famous soldier expressed his profound regret; the greatest editor in the world observed *ex cathedra* that such men as Gasgoyne were scarce.

Dorothy collapsed utterly. God had been too cruel! Susan, looking very sour, scowled at all the world, especially the baby. Why had Gasgoyne and his misbegotten brat spoiled her young mistress's life? She asked herself this question a score of times, and then put another—a poser—to Dorothy.

"What are you going to do now, Miss Dorothy?"

Poor Dorothy, haggard from loss of sleep, perplexed, miserable in mind and body, answered irritably:

"Of course I shall bring the child up as my own."

To this Susan replied with one word:

"Lor'!"

The faithful creature had the wit and kindness to perceive that, in Dorothy's present mood, expostulation, however discreetly worded, would be the further laceration of surfaces already cruelly abraded. So, for the moment, she held her tongue. Some five days later Moira Curragh rushed down from Paris. Her astonishment and exasperation when she heard the truth from beginning to end may be imagined.

"Doll, you are crazy. Do you know what the world will say?"

"Why should I care what the world says?"

"They will say that this is your child; that Dick Gasgoyne—oh, my dear, you must let me take you in hand. I'm so glad I came. If I had delayed——" She broke off abruptly, surprised by the expression forming itself upon her friend's face—a certain rigid determination.

"The world, you say, Moira, will believe that Dick's son is mine?"

"Of course——"

"Then I accept the world's verdict."

"You are quite cracked."

"Cracked? Well, in a sense I am cracked. I feel exactly as if I were Dick's widow. Oh, Moira, don't I read what is in your mind? You'd take me back to Paris with you, cheer me up, buy me clothes and find me a good fellow for a husband. It is written on your

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kind face. And in reply, I can only say, 'No, thank you.' Yes; I am cracked," she laughed gently, as if with a sense of the irony of life, "and some of the love which makes life worth living to women has leaked out of me, but some remains. And he loves me. He is mine, *mine.*"

At these words, so quickly spoken, Moira Curragh, whom her enemies stigmatised as a heartless butterfly, bent her head and burst into tears. Dorothy did the comforting, after all; and her eyes were quite dry. Later, Lady Curragh asked an important question—

"What will you tell your poor Aunt Charlotte?"

"You needn't pity her. Hav'n't you heard the news? Amy is going to marry Teddy Ipswich, who will never give her a moment's uneasiness."

"It?"

"Yes; I am asked to be bridesmaid. The letter arrived only this morning."

"He was devoted to you once. How men chop and change——"

"Some men do, and many women." Slight lines formed themselves about her mouth and eyes. She was wondering whether she envied Amy, and all the girls of Amy's pattern who are not capable of love or hate or any emotion whatever other than a tepid self-satisfaction. In quantity and quality, Teddy Ipswich's brains might compare favourably, perhaps,

with a hen's, but he could make Amy happy. Beneath his touch and the words, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," Amy would purr like a plump, white cat.

"You must tell your people something, Dorothy."

"Moira, how understanding of you to know I can't tell them everything."

"Yes, yes. And the pompous '*I* told you so; *I* warned you, my dear Dorothy.' But still, something——"

"Half the truth—eh? I can write that I shall never marry, that I have adopted a child, that I propose to call myself 'Mrs.' I must expect red-hot letters, but they will cool crossing the Channel. It is so comforting to remember that both uncle and aunt are the worst sailors in the world."

Lady Curragh protested eloquently for nearly half an hour. At the end, she said, with exasperation:

"This is suttee. I wonder you are not in weeds."

Dorothy was in white, unrelieved by any colour.

"I wear white, not black," said Dorothy. "I look a fright in black."

"Oh!" murmured her friend, reflecting that the case was far from hopeless.

"Baby detests black."

"You wear white on his account."

"Moira, let us talk of him; it will do me

good. He is such a darling; and both Solomon and poor old Susan hate him."

Lady Curragh had a boy of her own, and was quite willing to talk baby-talk. Presently, Susan brought the child to the salon, and Moira Curragh, exclaiming, "'Pon my word, I never saw such a baby, never!" was repaid for a long and dusty railway journey by the first radiant smile she had seen upon her friend's face.

"Isn't he? And now he is all mine."

Next day, Lady Curragh returned to Paris. As the train bore her through the pleasant orchards of France, she had time to reflect dispassionately upon what Dorothy was doing. At parting, after kissing her friend, she had whispered: "I have told you before that you are a heavenly fool." Dorothy had smiled, and in her smile lay wisdom, not folly, as if she alone of all the world knew that she had done well. Moira had to admit that this particular fool was living in a paradise. From the windows of her carriage Moira could see a landscape of delicate shades of colour which in combination produced a suffused neutral tint. If there was no "wild freshness of morning" (Moira was too true an Irishwoman not to set an extravagant value upon vivid colour and dashing action), one could not deny or ignore the sweet restfulness of afternoon, herald of "evening's best light." Dorothy loved her garden, her books, her piano, and *her son*. Moira had these blessings also, and

many others : notably, a husband who adored her, and an ever-increasing circle of friends, whose friendliness, while undeniably flattering, became at times importunate. She told herself that she loved her boy devotedly, but she saw very little of him.

Nevertheless, dominating these reflections, rose the conviction that Dorothy, of all the women she knew, was best equipped to be a happy wife and mother. It was intolerable to think of her wearing the willow for ever and ever. It was equally intolerable, perhaps more so, to conceive of her as a shunned creature, one with a possibly abominable secret, one to be "cut" by society, disregarded if not disavowed by her high and mighty relations, unworthy, for instance, to assist at the wedding of Amy and "It." Moira clenched her fists and set her teeth. In spirit she was groaning out, "Oh, Doll, Doll, you are a fool, and that is why I love you so!"

Then, to distract her mind, she wondered what her exact feeling would have been had Dorothy been about to marry "It," with his many acres, his famous diamonds, his house full of Romneys and Gainsboroughs. "It" had offered his possessions to Dorothy, not once, but half a dozen times. If she had accepted them, would her life, presumably, have been happier? To this question Lady Curragh could find no answer in a very tired and muddled head.

CHAPTER VI

CHAMPFLEURY

WITHIN a month, Dorothy moved to Champfleury, a pretty village not far from Vouvray, and situated high upon the right bank of the Loire. Here she found a small furnished house standing in a pretty garden, which she took on a three years' lease in the name of Madame Armine. The reasons which constrained her to borrow a name are fairly obvious, but they were fortified by the Helmingham letters which streamed across the Channel for a fortnight, and then stopped suddenly. Sir Augustus exacted entire frankness, but quite wrecked any chance of obtaining it by the wording of his penultimate sentence: "I shall endeavour to bear any revelation, however shocking it may be, with patience and fortitude. I remember your upbringing, which was undisciplined and harum-scarum, but I insist upon the truth."

Aunt Charlotte wrote in a kinder vein :

"My poor unhappy child,—

"What am I to think? Your letter has distressed us terribly. Your dear uncle—whose strength makes him so nobly forbearing with

the infirmities of weakness—has been indeed a tower to me. We can guess what has happened. And only the other day we met the Pilkington-Brownes and, *much against her will*, for she's a good Christian woman, she told us of meeting you at Dinan and what went on there. Oh, my child, I was wretched when your mother died, and now, how thankful am I that she was spared *this*! But do not harden your heart against us! *We will hush things up*; for the present you are wise to keep out of England. If I were not distracted with Amy's wedding, I should cross to you. The dear Duke of Anglia is our guest—he is Edward's godfather—but nothing has given me any pleasure since your letter came. You have pledged us to secrecy—*was that necessary?*—but I should like to speak to the dear vicar, may I? Augustus says I am blameless, but I cannot forget that I sent that terrible invitation. If it had only gone to Chelsea Barracks! I implore you to open your heart to

“Your miserable Aunt,
“CHARLOTTE HELMINGHAM.”

Amy, that virgin page, wrote in semi-ignorance of what had taken place. She was aware that Dorothy had distressed her parents to such an extent as to interfere with her approaching marriage, and even to tarnish slightly its gilded splendours. Let us not blame our Amy because she displayed curiosity and petulance.

"What *have* you been up to, my dearest Dollie? Father and mother are *so* cross, and, really, it's rather hard on me and Teddy. Father told me, or, rather, I wheedled it out of him, that you had adopted a baby!!! I never heard of anything so utterly amazing. Is it a French baby? For some absurd reason I have been ordered not to tell Teddy, from whom I have no secrets. I am afraid you have done something *very* naughty! I do wish you would write me *everything*. I am now quite as good as a married woman. You were horrid to refuse to be my bridesmaid, but if you had arrived with a baby—really, it is *too* extraordinary. What does it call you? Or is it too wee to speak? Did you buy it? Or find it? I can remember you saying to me years ago, when we were quite tots, that you would like to have a real baby, although you hated dolls. I had more sense than you, because I said I liked the dolls best. One could always put them away in a drawer when one was tired of playing with them. Darling Teddy has given me the loveliest rope of pearls."

When Dorothy received these letters her first impulse was to cross the Channel and to confront her uncle with the baby's birth certificate. Doubtless a wiser, a more worldly young woman, would have done so instantly. The temptation to clear herself of a shameful imputation was strong: but her love for the child, her love for the child's father, were

stronger. She realised clearly enough that all the truth must be told, and, in fancy, she could hear the pompous, carefully articulated accents of Sir Augustus: "My dear Dorothy, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. You are Latinist enough to understand the quotation; but the story you have told me only fortifies me in my own good judgment in having shown an unfortunate, and, permit me to add, unprincipled young man the door!" With that he would purse a slightly swollen underlip, and refuse to continue the conversation. Aunt Charlotte, good, kind soul, would renew those offers of kinship and affection which Dorothy had found such difficulty before in declining. Lastly, the adopted child of a spinster would excite endless gossip. A shadow would envelop him from the beginning, a stain would discolour his innocent blue eyes. When he was old enough to think intelligently, he would ask for details about the mother who had abandoned him.

Let us admit, then, that a foolish, an indiscreet, a short-sighted determination was reached by Dorothy. Let us admit, also, that she was furious with her relations because—as Moira Curragh had predicted—they placed the worst construction possible upon her explanations. And she was too young and too sore at that moment to forgive them, or to try to look at her act with their blinking eyes. She replied coldly that she had nothing to add to her first letter. Anything would have served her better

than this cold, dignified refusal to exculpate herself from an abominable accusation. "Do not let me hear that abandoned creature's name!" commanded Sir Augustus, in the full sonorous voice with which he read family prayers. "She is no longer *my* niece."

Lady Helmingham wrote again, thereby softening Dorothy's resentment, but confirming her resolution to hold her tongue. Aunt Charlotte, well-meaning, muddled, always dependent upon others, would abide by her husband's judgment in this as in everything else.

Because uncle and aunt reflected faithfully the opinions and judgments of the world in which she had lived hitherto, Dorothy determined to drop out of it altogether. She sold the lease of the house in Oakley Street, and the furniture Dick and she had bought together, which she felt she could not bear to see again. But she sent for her father's prints and engravings. Then came the adoption of a new name. Armine pleased her. She shrank from giving another woman's son her own name. His father's did not belong to him.

And so it came to pass that Dorothy dropped out of one circle of acquaintance into another, who, with Gallic politeness, accepted her as a young English widow with a beautiful baby and independent means. Some tongues wagged, but Susan Judkins looked so aggressively respectable, and Dorothy herself met suspicious glances with an air so candid, a bearing so

assured and dignified, that the world of Champfleury became unanimous in agreeing that Madame Armine was good as she was charming—" *très, très bien, avec un bébé comme un ange!* "

Long before this the masterpiece could say "Mum" and "Min." He called Dorothy "Mum," possibly an imitation of Susan's "M'm," always uttered with a defiant emphasis. It is certain that "Mum" was the first articulate word the Wonder uttered, and Dorothy, whom we know to be truthful, swore that he said it looking into her eyes and smiling. Later, he christened himself "Min"—presumably an abbreviation of Armine.

Susan appointed herself head nurse. "I shall do my duty," she told Dorothy, "but the child can't expect me to love it, miss—I mean, ma'am."

"But he will," said Dorothy; "and in your hard old heart you do love him."

"If I was not a Christian woman, I should curse it," Susan had replied. It will be noticed that she refused the infant the small compliment of sex.

"You are a pagan, but Min will convert you."

"Not it," retorted the ancient handmaid.

When Min was two years old, he fell ill. Susan Judkins assumed a face of stone. "God knows what's best," she said to herself, but she meant that she knew also, and that death would cut knots. But she had not steeled herself against the piteous sight of a child's sufferings, nor had she understood what he had become

to her mistress. Min grew steadily worse. Finally there came an awful moment, when a consulting surgeon advised an operation.

"Not on *him*," said Susan, shuddering: "not on such a tiny mite."

"Nothing else can save him," said Dorothy. "Oh, Susan, you don't—you don't wish that he would die, do you?"

"Miss Dorothy, I do not deny that I have thought that would be a way out of the wood."

"God forgive you, Susan, when you know what he is to me!"

Susan bustled away, red of face, but she wiped her eyes with her apron more than once when she found herself alone.

Dorothy sat down in the pretty salon, gay with flowers and chintz, listening to the whispers of the two doctors in consultation over Min's tormented little body. Solomon thrust a cold nose into her hand.

"And you don't want him to live either," she exclaimed.

Solomon caught her eye and held it. His clear, moss-agate-coloured orbs shone with pity and sympathy. As plainly as a tyke can put it, he was expressing his regret and promising amendment. Then he wagged his short tail hopefully. Dorothy took his head between her hands.

"Do you think Min will get well?" she asked.

Solomon considered a moment; then he tore his head out of Dorothy's hands, and, very

deliberately, lay upon his back—a pose known as dying for his queen. He would always lie like this, quite immovable, till Dorothy said: "Live and eat!" Now, without any word, he lay perfectly still, and then jumped to his feet and tore round the room like one possessed. But he never barked. It was uncanny to see him.

"I believe he does know," said Dorothy.

But an awful twenty-four hours followed, so poignant in its anxiety and misery that Dorothy never seemed quite the same again. The look of the nymph, which the actor had noted when he passed her upon Albert Bridge upon the day of the storm, vanished for ever while Min fought for his life, and she stood by, unable to do anything except hope and pray.

Towards the end of this terrible period, the doctor, a kind clever fellow, who had children of his own, insisted upon her taking a mouthful of food and fresh air.

"Madame," he said gravely, "you will want all your strength to nurse him."

Dorothy thanked him, and left the room. Her hands were closed, as if she were holding on tight to the morsel of hope in the doctor's voice. Outside the bedroom door, she discovered Susan, not only red-faced, but red-eyed.

"Susan!"

Susan spoke very hurriedly, with a choked, hardly articulate utterance.

"If it cost me my place, I was going to get

you out of that. I know why you've not let me go near him. You don't trust me, because of what I said. I dessay you thought I'd forget to give him his medicine, quite accidentally on purpose."

"Susan, you're crazy."

"No, I ain't, but I have been. Yes, crazy and wicked. When you said, 'God forgive you, Susan, yesterday,' it come upon me sudden-like that you meant me to understand that God, in His mercy, might forgive such a mis'able sinner, but that *you* wouldn't, not if it was never so. Now, I've been on my knees askin' Him to take me and leave you Min. Yes, I have, and I mean it. I'm a hateful old woman, and you'll never forgive me, never."

"Susan!"

"Oh, Miss Dorothy——"

They fell into each other's arms, but even at this moment Susan's common sense routed her sentiment. She released herself quickly, and said, quite in her old authoritative manner, "It's not salt tears you want, but a glass of wine, and a bit of chicken."

"I believe you love Min, Susan."

"Of course I do, but I wouldn't allow it. I wanted to hate the blessed lamb more than I ever wanted anything in my life. Now, you come along with me."

That night Min took a turn for the better. The operation was pronounced entirely successful. And within ten days, the little fellow

looked as if nothing had happened ; but upon his body and upon the hearts of two women were scars.

After this incident, life at Champfleury flowed on as placidly as the great river below Dorothy's cottage. It would be optimism to state that Dorothy was happy, but we have her own testimony that she was not unhappy. And there were wonderful moments, when she forgot everything except the ravishing fact that a child loved her. Most healthy women have the maternal instinct strongly developed, but as often as not it is as strongly repressed, or perhaps diverted into other channels. With Dorothy this instinct seemed to blow, to bloom, to expand, day by day, nourished by what it fed on. Philosopher enough to put from her the past, she sunned herself in the present, with an occasional jaunt into the future. She sent for Herbert Spencer's book on Education. Let us whisper that she pinched a bit, so as to provide a fund for private and public school expenses. But her excursions into the future carried her no further than, let us say, Winchester, where Richard Gasgoyne had been educated. Of her own life, apart from Min's, she refused to think lucidly, or, indeed, to evoke any image whatever. Some women are extremely clever at adaptations; in a round hole they grow round, in a square hole they develop right angles. Dorothy told herself

that she was a chameleon, because she assumed the colour, the soft grey neutral tints, of the house and place wherein the hours drifted by so pleasantly and placidly.

One gets further insight into her character and temperament, when one realises that she held fast to the conviction that Min, since he had survived a dangerous operation, would live to do all that his sire would have done had he not been slain in Africa. Min was going to be a great man.

It is not to be denied that the circle in which she lived grew smaller. For instance, partly from motives of economy, partly from lack of interest in distant happenings, partly, also, because the mere mention of certain familiar names and places provoked pangs, she gave up her English newspaper: perhaps the most fatal mistake of any she had made. No letters came from England either; and Moira Curragh, whose husband had been made governor of a distant colony, wrote but seldom, because Dorothy took an unconscionable time in answering letters. Here, again, we get a glimpse of a castaway turning aching eyes from the element which has witnessed disaster. Dorothy could not think of Moira without seeing Dick.

Six months afterwards the unforeseen occurred. It chanced that an English spinster had come to Champfleury to pass the winter and to improve—so she told Dorothy—her

French accent. Dorothy was drawn to her; perceiving much that was beautiful beneath an uncompromisingly plain exterior. The spinster's name was Mirehouse. Two or three persons called her Adelaide. Mirehouse *père* had been a well-to-do merchant, ruined in his old age by centralisation. A vast emporium had established itself in the provincial town in which Mr. Mirehouse had laboured long and valiantly. The cockle-shell tried to compete against the line-of-battleship, and, of course, foundered. Had Mr. Mirehouse retired with his savings, all would have been well, but with British obstinacy he refused to move till his last penny was spent; then he retreated suddenly to the cemetery. His two daughters, neither of them young nor strong, had to begin life again as governesses. After a decade of middle-class teaching, the younger sister, Laura, married her employer, a widower of sixty, with a large family, a chronic dyspepsia, and a nice snug business, which Miss Mirehouse euphemistically described as the meat trade. Laura's husband was indeed a butcher—a pork-butcher, if the whole truth must be told.

"How she could marry him," sighed Miss Mirehouse. "But she has, and in consequence I have felt myself justified in spending a certain portion of my savings. I am about to *reculer pour mieux sauter*," she blushed faintly. "You know what I mean, dear Mrs. Armine. If I perfect my French accent, I can demand a

higher salary. The French here is very pure, I have been told."

"Yes," said Dorothy.

"And everything else is so good and so cheap."

After this Miss Mirehouse was in and out of Dorothy's cottage at least once a day. She asked no questions, evinced no curiosity whatever, and adored Min. Solomon treated her with distinguished consideration.

In return for such small courtesies as occasional meals, the loan of books, a nosegay or two, Miss Mirehouse was punctilious in bringing to Dorothy *The Illustrated London News*, despatched regularly from the house of the pork-butcher, after he and his wife had—as Miss Mirehouse put it—"perused it."

"My sister Laura has begged my acceptance of other things—we are about the same size—but I could not justify myself in accepting more than this. Pray keep it as long as you like."

"Thank you very much," said Dorothy.

One never-to-be-forgotten day, Miss Mirehouse arrived with the paper in her cotton-gloved hand. As she handed it to Dorothy, with the usual "Pray keep it as long as it suits your convenience," she added, "It is more than usually interesting this week. There is a long review, and some interesting pen-and-ink sketches of Mr. Gasgoyne's book."

"Mr.—Gasgoyne——"

Afterwards, she wondered that she had been

able to speak ; but, although the name struck her with violence, her quick wits apprehended instantly that Miss Mirehouse must be speaking of the other Gasgoyne—the Coldstreamer.

“Mr. Richard Gasgoyne, you know.”

Dorothy hesitated a second, then, quite easily, she said : “Dear Miss Mirehouse, I am ashamed to say I do not know. What has Mr. Gasgoyne done ?”

Happily, the spinster's modesty averted the catastrophe which impended.

“You will read it all there,” she said, indicating the paper. “How is darling Min this morning ?”

“He is with Susan Judkins,” Dorothy replied absently. “In the next room, if you would like to see him.”

“If I may——”

As soon as she had gone, Dorothy opened the paper. Her fingers trembled slightly, because nobody of the name of Gasgoyne could be indifferent to her ; perhaps instinct warned her of what she was about to find.

Five minutes later, Miss Mirehouse, returning from the nursery, uttered a shrill cry. Dorothy was lying back in her arm-chair—senseless. The paper, unnoticed in the general excitement, lay upon the floor.

When she recovered consciousness, she was lying on her bed, and Susan was bending over her, holding up a warning finger.

“You keep quiet, Miss Dorothy. You've

just fainted, that's all. It must ha' been the smell o' onions in that raggoo. Miss Mirehouse noticed it. She's with Master Min outside."

"Get me *The Illustrated London News*."

"Lor'!"

"At once, please. It's on the floor in the salon."

When the faithful Susan returned, Dorothy was walking up and down, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks ablaze.

"Mercy me! What's happened?"

"Susan, he's not dead. Do you understand?"

Mr. Gasgoyne is alive—*alive!*"

"God preserve us!"

"He has preserved him. Oh, Susan, give me the paper quick. I must read it to you. He's alive. Oh, Susan, Susan!" She knelt down. "Let us return thanks together for God's mercy."

The old woman and the young knelt side by side in solemn silence.

A slight attack of hysteria, laughing and weeping, followed, treated drastically by Susan.

"Miss Dorothy, you stop it. If you don't be'ave I'll—I'll slap Master Min; yes, I will. That'll bring you to your senses. If you go on like this, Mr. Gasgoyne'll find you in your coffin, and what would he say to me then, I'd like to know?"

But has joy ever been known to kill a young and strong woman? Dorothy stopped crying, although she laughed at intervals, a laugh that warmed chilled fibres in Susan's heart.

Gasgoyne, it seems, had been captured and held a prisoner by the savage tribe which had attacked and massacred the expeditionary force. The review went on to describe Gasgoyne's thrilling escape, his adventures, the knowledge of the country he had gleaned, and so forth. At the end Susan said suddenly:

"Lor', Miss Dorothy, if we'd kept on with *The Morning Post* we'd ha' known all this six months ago."

Dorothy gasped.

"So we should."

But—so she reflected—Gasgoyne might not have returned to England immediately. Her speculations were interrupted by Susan, who had been glancing through the paper.

"Here's his photograph, Miss Dorothy."

"Shush-h-h! You *must* remember to call me 'Ma'am.'"

"Not when we're alone, not *now*," said Susan, with decision. "Pore young gentleman, he has had a rough time of it! Skin and bone!"

Dorothy gazed at a much-shrunken Dick. The photograph, she noticed, had been taken in Africa. Under the heading "Our Illustrations," she found the following paragraph:

"Mr. Richard Gasgoyne, whose now famous book is reviewed at length in these columns, has settled permanently in London. We are glad to be able to state authoritatively that he has recovered his health."

Dorothy read this aloud, then she said, with decision: "I shall go to London at once."

"And me and Master Min?"

Dorothy considered. The month was February.

"You and Min must stay here. I shall come back as soon as I have seen him."

"He'll bring you back," amended Susan.

"Perhaps," Dorothy blushed.

A minute later, she was explaining to Miss Mirehouse that business of importance was taking her from Champfleury. Of her fainting fit she said nothing, and the discreet spinster asked no questions.

"I shall come to see the little darling every day."

"Thank you, thank you," said Dorothy. Her face looked so radiant that Miss Mirehouse ventured upon a compliment.

"My dear, your business must be of a pleasant nature. You are positively beaming."

"Am I?" said Dorothy. Then the desire to acknowledge her great happiness overwhelmed her.

"When I return I shall have something to tell you; yes, I am happy. God has been very good to me."

Miss Mirehouse tried—and quite successfully—to hide her curiosity. When she came to Champfleury some one had told her that Dorothy was a widow. Later, Susan Judkins, in answer to a question delicately put by the little spinster,

had said, "Yes, his father's dead." Seeing the radiance in Dorothy's eyes, Miss Mirehouse leaped to the conclusion that Min was about to be presented with a step-father. A jealous pang pierced the heart of this insignificant, dowdy, middle-aged woman, who had inspired nothing much stronger than the lukewarm affection of a few pupils. Why should Dorothy have so much—youth, health, ample means, an angel of a child, and *two* husbands? Poor Miss Mirehouse gazed ruefully at her carefully darned cotton gloves, at her stout serviceable skirt, at her elastic-side boots. Then she told herself primly that she could not approve of a second marriage.

The Channel crossing contrasted curiously with the same journey undertaken three years before. The dominant note then, ringing piteously in Dorothy's ears, had been the knell of the year, which had given and had taken away so much. The presentiment, too, that Crystal was dying, that she might arrive to find her dead, had lain heavy upon her. And over land and sea hung wracks of cloud, torn and twisted by the wind into monstrous shapes of darkness.

Now, in the early February, the skies were clear, and upon all things lay the magical touch of spring. The air was sparkingly fresh and bracing. Hoarfrost had silvered the trees and the grasses in the fields, but when the

sun rose a delicious warmth pervaded the air. The joyous notes of the blackbird echoed in every coppice; the fluting of the robin singing to his mate could be heard; the male chaffinches, no longer banded together, were busy a-courting; from wattled folds came the feeble, piteous bleat of newly born lambs. Moreover, Dorothy was peculiarly sensible of the charm of her own country, of its gripping fascination after absence, of its power to evoke half-forgotten facts and fancies of long ago, and to present them not exactly as they were, but as they might have been under the happiest circumstances. Most of us are aware of this glamour when we revisit old haunts, and if we are wise we make no effort to dispel it, but rather welcome it. Time has rubbed down some rough edges, hard stones have been covered with soft mosses and lichens, the red bricks are mellower in tint; everything is different—and we know it—but we say that it is exactly the same.

During this journey, Dorothy had time to answer several difficult questions. Why had Dick not attempted to communicate with her? The paper spoke of illness; he might have staggered back a wreck, broken in mind and body. But the Press which he had served faithfully must have proclaimed his resurrection from the dead. The Helminghams—in particular the chief of the house—allowed no jot or tittle of news to escape them. It was

cruel of them not to have written, unless—Dorothy felt herself to be blushing furiously, afire with indignation, with helpless resentment. The Helminghams, of course, were the last people in the world to speak, when silence, according to their inviolable rules, might be conscientiously deemed more appropriate. Aunt Charlotte, who was not a Helmingham, might have bleated faintly, "Oh, Augustus, I must let Dorothy know," and Sir Augustus would have answered in his Mr. Dombey manner, "My dear Charlotte, I am surprised at you. You propose to compound a moral felony, to be a party to a shocking misdemeanour," and so forth. And if Dick had called upon her august relatives, she was sure that the flunkies had slammed a nicely varnished door in his face. If he had gone to Vauxhall Bridge Road, he would learn nothing; if he went to Oakley Street, ignorance would answer the bell. Moira Curragh was somewhere in New Zealand.

No; deliberately she had cut herself off from Dick because she had made certain that he was dead.

When she reached London, she whispered to herself that she was in the same city with Dick, that in a few minutes she would know his address, that in less than half an hour she might be in his arms. She drove to a hotel, where she left her luggage, and then went on in the same cab to Dick's publishers, who, of

course, would know Dick's address. But, to her surprise, a civil clerk hemmed and hawed a semi-refusal. A note would be duly forwarded, or a telegram. Dorothy, who had forgotten to give her name, said excitedly, "I don't think you quite understand; I have only just learnt that Mr. Gasgoyne is alive; I have mourned him as dead. I have travelled from Touraine to see him. Surely you don't refuse me his address."

At this the clerk, who was human, said amiably:

"I will speak to the head of the firm. Your name, madam, if you please?"

Dorothy hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Miss Fairfax: Miss Dorothy Fairfax."

"Thank you."

Half a minute later he came back, accompanied, by a tall, thin, kindly faced man.

"Miss Fairfax, will you come into my room?"

"Certainly," said Dorothy. She was wondering what was the matter with the head of the firm. Did he suffer from a slight form of St. Vitus's dance, or was it an incipient palsy? He seemed to be much afflicted with some unfamiliar nervous affection. Dorothy followed him into a square, cosy room lined with books, in the centre of which stood an enormous desk, littered with papers, letters, and manuscripts. There was a smell of musty leather coming from a row of quartos on the bookshelf nearest

to Dorothy's chair. That faint, decaying odour came back to her a thousand times.

"So you are Miss Fairfax?" His voice quavered oddly.

"Yes."

"You—pardon me, for I must seem indiscreet, but you will forgive me. You—you were engaged to Mr. Gasgoyne, before he went to Africa?"

"Yes," said Dorothy gravely. "I was engaged to him."

"And the engagement was broken off."

"It was indefinitely postponed."

The publisher, who was not only at the head of his own business, but a personage in the social world, picked up a pencil and began to make a series of dots upon a scribbling pad. His partner and his wife were aware of this habit, which indicated indecision and anxiety.

"My clerk tells me that you have only just heard of Mr. Gasgoyne's return to life and England."

"The day before yesterday."

"And you know nothing more?"

"He is not ill?"

"He is perfectly well."

"You have something to tell me; what is it? I am sure you are kind; you wish to spare me some sudden shock—some—oh, what is it? I know nothing, except that he has written a book."

"Just so; a very successful book. The third edition comes out to-morrow. I have a

copy here." He picked up a large, attractively bound volume, which he held towards Dorothy. As she took it, she saw that the man's eyes wandered uneasily from hers. He could not face the startled interrogation of her glance. Abruptly he rose from his chair and walked to the window; when he returned he had recovered his self-control. Dorothy, holding the book in her hands, stared helplessly at him.

"Mr. Gasgoyne has gone abroad for a fortnight."

"Abroad?"

Instantly Dorothy smiled, divining the truth; interpreting the man's awkward manner, his hesitation, his evasions. Dick and she had crossed each other. He was on his way to her, and this publisher, evidently a friend also, knew it. Dick had discovered her address. That was like him. He had hunted for her. She put her thoughts into quick words:

"He has been looking for me?"

"Yes."

The publisher pointed at the book in Dorothy's hand, as he continued in the same quiet, even voice: "If you will look at the dedication, you will understand why I asked you to give me this interview."

He turned abruptly and walked to the window.

Dorothy opened the book. Upon the dedicatory page were inscribed three words—**TO MY WIFE.**



CHAPTER VII

EVISCERATION

DOROTHY could never remember with any definiteness how she escaped from Gasgoyne's publisher, but outwardly she behaved with coolness and self-possession. Her most vivid memory of what followed was that of pledging the publisher to secrecy and then finding herself in Piccadilly, clutching Dick's book, dedicated to Dick's wife. She preserved a dim recollection of laughing aloud and meeting the amazed and amused glance of a foot-passenger, a very correctly attired youth, on his way to his club. After that, although she was able to control herself, she had a feeling that others must know what had come to pass, that her story was written in indelible ink upon her face. The porter at the hotel seemed to stare, the chambermaid, who answered the bell, conveyed by her manner that she knew everything, that she could divine subtleties of the feminine mind which as yet Dorothy herself had hardly had time to apprehend or even to perceive. The girl looked as if she also were torn in two

by misery ; her eyes, positively, were wet ; she might have been crying outside the door.

“Have you lost a—relation ?”

“A relation ? I could spare one or two of them ! I’ve lost my young man, miss.”

The young man, it appeared, had abandoned her for a “shoppie,” a minx who tried to ape real ladies, and, with the help of pinchbeck jewellery and a new hat, had succeeded in alluring Jack from the side of an honest and faithful Jill.

“He’ll come back to you,” said Dorothy.

“Not ‘im, miss. He went off in a huff like ; and he won’t come back. I know he won’t. They never do. If I’d held on to ‘im tighter——”

Dorothy tried to comfort her, but very unsuccessfully. After the girl had left the room, she marshalled her own thoughts, faced the facts, speculated miserably upon what might have been. If she had held on tighter——! If she had continued her subscription to an English newspaper——! Who has not writhed under the torture of realising how insignificant an incident may mar our lives, until the higher wisdom teaches that nothing is insignificant, except perhaps our own sickly and languishing efforts to rebel against Omnipotence.

Dorothy remained in her own room, and ate with difficulty one poached egg. A man, she reflected idly, would probably have heartened himself up with the best food and drink he

could afford. In affliction, is weak tea a better substitute than champagne? Dorothy's tea was very weak, and she lacked the energy to order a stronger brew.

She passed a wretched night. Twice she essayed to read Gasgoyne's book; but it was so individual, so personal, so saturated throughout with his own particular quips and turns of speech, that the man, so to speak, seemed to stand at her side. She saw him plainly, and he mocked her with his blue, sparkling eyes, which shone warmly upon another woman: his wife.

Dorothy fell to wondering what manner of woman she was. She wished that she had asked the publisher for details. Was she pretty? Clever? Good and kind? She must have great qualities, to be sure, or Dick would not have chosen her. Had Dick told her about Crystal?

Next day, the necessity of speech sent her in search of Crystal. The only other woman in the world to whom she could have spoken—Moirá Curragh—was in Australia, probably in ignorance of Dick's return to life. Dorothy had not answered Crystal's letter announcing her intention of abandoning Min, but from time to time she had heard of the triumphs of the actress, now regarded as a star in the theatrical firmament, and likely to become one of the first magnitude. Often she had wondered if Crystal suffered any pangs of remorse; if she

had felt invisible hands tugging at her heart strings ; if, when alone at night, she heard the voice of a child ? Perhaps. And with the flight of the months, pity for Crystal had softened revulsion. The mother-love waxed strong in Dorothy, sweetening her thoughts and actions so pervasively and subtly, that its absence in the real mother came to be regarded as a calamity rather than a crime. Dorothy never felt the baby's lips upon her own without the reflection : " Poor Crystal, if she knew what she was missing ! "

She scanned the column of theatrical announcements, assured that she would find Crystal's name ; for, driving from Waterloo Station upon the previous day, she had seen it in letters a yard long upon the hoardings. In the morning paper, however, it was not. The thought followed that the actress might be ill. Crystal loved Dick and her profession. Dorothy had wondered more than once which might be the stronger passion. News of Dick's death, it is true, had kindled an intensity of feeling disastrous to the complexions of certain ladies in the stalls ; but Dick's marriage might well have overwhelmed a passionate and ill-disciplined creature.

After breakfast, a sorry meal of tea and toast, Dorothy drove to the theatre where Crystal had been playing recently. In the prettily decorated entrance hall hung large framed photographs of the actress. Dorothy paused

to look at them. Certainly Crystal had changed immeasurably. Success had touched her with magic wand. She had acquired an indefinable air of distinction and self-possession. Her beautiful face, with its slightly derisive smile, seemed to defy the beholder to resist its power, a power—so Dorothy reflected—not too scrupulous in its triumphant manifestation. With a sigh she crossed the hall and asked the keeper of the box-office if Miss Wride was in town.

“Miss Wride is away,” he answered politely. “She is married.”

Afterwards, Dorothy wondered if she were incredibly stupid, inasmuch as this piece of news aroused merely a vague and incurious interest, and the sense that to Crystal married she could say nothing. Of a sudden, Crystal seemed to have been wafted far away beyond her horizon.

“Thank you,” said Dorothy.

It was very early, and the business of the day had not yet begun. The young man in the office ventured on a remark.

“Her marriage made a splash,” he said; “I think she regards it as a tremendous ‘ad,’ and so it is.”

“I had not heard of it.”

“You know Miss Wride?”

“I knew her very well indeed once.”

The young man happened to be a kind soul, and like most members of his profession in-

ordinately convinced that anything which concerned "stars" must be of overwhelming interest to all the world. He handed Dorothy a newspaper, neatly rolled.

"We sent out scores of these," he said. "You will find everything described in detail, and pictures of her frocks. They made a sort of special edition of it."

Dorothy accepted the paper, thanked the young man, and went back to her hansom. If her reflections had any particular definiteness, they took the form of indifference regarding Crystal's husband and Dick's wife. The odds were great that she knew neither. Not till she reached her room at the hotel did she open the paper.

Then another great shock laid its paralysing touch upon her.

Dick Gasgoyne had married Crystal.

The first effect of this second cruel blow was to crush Dorothy into a creature hardly recognisable. In her jealousy, her misery, her futile rage, she became as Crystal. She could feel her nails upon Crystal's cheeks and eyes. She desired intensely to injure her and Dick, and to injure each—a subtler injury—through the medium of the other.

And Min was the weapon which the Fates had thrust into her hands. It was likely that Crystal had concealed Min's birth from Dick, that she had married him under false pretences,

by fraud. And Dick loathed fraud and deceit. When he knew the truth, he would turn in shuddering disgust from his wife, as he had turned from her before. And before the honeymoon had waned, bride and groom would know of Min's existence. Min, who was no pitiful waif of the gutter, but a strong, masterful man-child.

She had the publisher's word that Dick had hunted for her. How was it that he, a trained journalist, had failed to find her? The conviction deepened that Dick must have abandoned his quest too lightly. Doubtless he had never forgiven the postponement of their marriage and her determination not to write to him. Perhaps—this gnawed at her vitals—he had taken for granted that she wished to hide herself from him, and, being a proud man, he had withdrawn from pursuit as soon as he learned that she had dropped out of society within a month of his departure.

But if she tried to find excuses for Dick, although hardly consciously, she knew that Crystal had behaved abominably: with inconceivable baseness and ingratitude. Dick, in a moment of weariness and despair, with his physical forces at a low ebb, had been snatched. Crystal loved him, and love, when unscrupulous, became an irresistible force. Dick had suffered himself to be re-entangled with a woman whom he did not love, but to whom he was grateful, and to whom he wished to make reparation.

Mentally speaking, she felt herself to be

eviscerated. Those who have suffered from overwhelming shock will remember this feeling of emptiness, as if the husk alone were left. And all one can whisper to such unfortunates is the certainty that because everything old seems to have been swept away, therefore something new must replace it. In the world of feeling, as in the physical world, Nature abhors a vacuum.

Three days later, Dorothy, looking terribly pale and tired, was back at Champfleury. She travelled to Touraine, *viâ* Paris, calling at the Institution for Little Mistakes to ask a question. Had Crystal made any effort to trace or recover her child? The Mother Superior smiled discreetly as she answered: "No." Then she added: "Such inquiries are rare, madame." Dorothy took her leave, knowing that Crystal had married Dick under false pretences. Dick, she knew, would have attempted to get back his son.

Min's delight at seeing her did not soften her heart, nor the resolution to make use of him as a weapon. Then followed a talk with Susan, who said at the end of it:

"I 'ad the feeling that Mr. Gasgoyne would *not* come back to you. I know something of men, ma'am—not much, I've not had the chances some have, but enough, quite enough. Whatever are you going to do?"

Dorothy had wondered how she would answer this inevitable question.

"Mr. Gasgoyne and his wife are in France, in the South; I have their address. Min must go to them."

"Lor'!" said Susan.

"I have quite made up my mind, Susan."

Susan looked into the dazed eyes of her mistress. Then she said slowly:

"You mean to leave Master Min with—her."

Susan Judkins's pronunciation of the pronoun had, for Dorothy, all the force and emphasis of a commination service. Dorothy's voice trembled slightly, as she answered:

"With—him."

"Well, I never——!"

"If you would speak plainly, Susan——"

"Leave Master Min with a man? What does a man know about the care of such a child as that? If you leave that blessed darling with him, she'll put it out of the way."

"Please don't be ridiculous."

Susan sniffed.

"What would you do, Susan?"

Susan burst into flame.

"What would I do? Why, he's yours legally; you've told me that again and again; and I'd keep the blessed lamb I would, and not turn him over to a heartless cuckoo, and a man as ain't fit to look after 'imself let alone a baby. Master Min's more to you than all the rest of the world. He's all you have. That's plain as print to me, though my eyes are dim. Why, you worship him."

Dorothy's pale cheeks flushed.

"The father must be told."

"Why? A nice father he's been, to be sure! Master Min will be packed off again to the Foundling——"

"No, no."

"You mean well, ma'am, of course. But you are a mere child yourself. If you'd plotted and planned to make Mr. Dick wild with rage and wickedness, you couldn't do better than take Master Min to his father."

And again the blood rushed hotly into Dorothy's cheeks. Susan, mistaking her emotion, drove home her arguments.

"I never was one to say 'I told you so,' but I did warn you that you were making an 'ole and corner business of this. Now to see such goodness as yours turning sour——"

"Susan——"

"Well?"

Dorothy paused. She was about to confess, to lay bare her real motives. Then, in a moment, she realised what it would mean to the faithful creature with such hard features and so soft a heart. She sighed, knowing that ever after Susan's admiration and respect would be heavy to bear. Then she said quietly:

"You would keep him without saying a word."

"Yes; I would, I would, I would. I'd sooner speak than hold my tongue any hour

of the day, but there's times and seasons to be quiet. And now that we've learned to love him you mean to give him up. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! And there's something else——"

"Well?"

"Miss Dorothy, you know it will be just awful for you meeting Mr. Gasgoyne."

"I might send Min with you."

"With me? No, ma'am, that dirty work I will not do."

This duologue took place in the small salon adjoining the nursery where, at the moment, Min was playing with Solomon. The wise tyke, having accepted Min, had determined to make the best of him. He regarded the child as a puppy, and when in want of a little relaxation, condescended to romp with him. Min gurgled and gloated over Solomon in a manner that might be boring, but must be considered flattering. And what great man has been proof against flattery? Now, through the open door, came the sound of Min's laughter and Solomon's short, sharp remarks.

"And you'd separate 'im and poor Solomon——"

This was Susan's last shot. It struck Dorothy's sense of humour such a shrewd blow that she laughed, and no derision lurked in that laughter.

"Solomon would be glad, Susan; he has been so jealous."

"That's over and done with. Solomon's got

his feelings, and there was a time when him and me thought alike, and quite right too, but now, after what we've all been through, the teething, and his illness, and that awful operation——”

At this moment Min's voice came floating to her ears: the insistent cry of the child who has never been denied:

“Mum, Mum, Mum!”

Dorothy rose up, pale and slightly excited.

“If there were a few more mothers like you,” murmured the astute Susan, “children like Master Min wouldn't live to wish they'd died before they were born.”

“Susan, do you understand what this means? It means deception, and, later, when Min asks questions, it means lies.”

“Call 'em fibs. No woman minds telling fibs for them she loves. Wouldn't I tell a big lie and stick to it, too, if it would do you any good?”

“Susan, we are wicked women.”

“You can speak for yourself, ma'am. I never felt better in my life.”

But Dorothy hesitated.

“Susan, if he should live to reproach me——”

“And if he should die with her of—neglect——”

“If one could ask for a sign,” said Dorothy desperately.

“The Lord has given you signs enough I

should think. Thomas himself couldn't doubt what was intended."

Again, Min cried aloud for Dorothy :
"Mum, Mum !"

Afterwards she wondered whether a sign had been vouchsafed her, for Min came toddling towards her, holding out his dimpled arms. Dorothy looked at Susan, who said meaningly : "He wants you. Don't you want him ?"

Dorothy bent down and picked up the child, who clung to her neck. When she felt his kisses upon her cheek, his fingers at her throat, his soft, lisping voice in her ear, she clutched him to her bosom with passion. Susan glanced at her, smiled knowingly, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII

VIS MEDICATRIX NATURÆ

WE pass over a few uneventful years. Looking back, long afterwards, Dorothy often wondered why they had been so happy. Perhaps compensation had so ordained it, realising that Dorothy was entitled to such rest and peace as may be found in the placid backwaters of the world rather than in its roaring thoroughfares. In cutting herself off from relations and friends she had lost much that most women rate highly, but she had gained freedom of thought and action. The hours glided by with so little friction that she might have imagined Time as standing still had it not been for the growth of Min. From the cradle he had shown himself to be masterful. Dorothy never forgot the first serious clash between their wills, when Min was three years old. Susan having forbidden the child to do something or other, he had disobeyed his too indulgent nurse. Appeal was made by both parties to Cæsar. Cæsar, of course, sustained authority. Whereupon Min, standing with head erect and defiant, had said emphatically :

"Susan says 'No,' and Mummie says 'No,' but Min says 'Yes'—and Min will."

And Min did the thing forbidden.

He had to be spanked. After the spanking, which he endured manfully, he remarked: "Mum spank Min too hard."

"Mum hopes that Min is sorry he was naughty."

"Min is very glad."

A year later, when he was caught playing with fire, a more serious whipping had to be administered. Dorothy cut a small hazel switch, which Susan and she tested in secret upon each other's hands.

Min received four stinging cuts. Next day, Dorothy, coming quietly into the nursery, found him dancing in front of the matches. He was advancing and retreating, stretching out his fingers, till they almost touched the box and then withdrawing them. Dorothy, unperceived by the urchin, watched him in amazement.

"See, Satan, see! I'm not touching 'em. See! You'd like me to, wouldn't you? But I won't. See, see!"

"What are you doing, Min?"

"Mumsie, I'm takin' in Satan. He thinks I'm going to touch the matches, but I ain't."

Dorothy taught him his first lessons, but she soon realised that he would need teaching other than she could give. Shall we say that she was afraid to imperil Min's adoration for

her by metamorphosing herself into a daily governess? At any rate a disciplinarian of a Frenchwoman was found in Tours, and under her able rule Min learned much that he never forgot. Then, one day, Susan said tartly:

“Master Min is becoming that Frenchified——”

He was eight years old, and big for his age, when Susan fired this train of gunpowder.

“Rubbish, Susan.”

“He speaks French like a Frenchy.”

“Of course he does, thank Heaven.”

“And he speaks English like a Frenchy.”

“Fiddlesticks!”

“You’re becoming Frenchified yourself, ma’am.”

“Really, Susan——”

“And so am I. It’s not natural. I’ve forgotten what bacon smells like for breakfast. We ought to go back to England. Master Min might attend Miss Mirehouse’s school in Winchester.”

This gave Dorothy pause. The excellent Miss Mirehouse had established a small day-school in the ancient city, and had forwarded a prospectus to her kindest and dearest Mrs. Armine. For two days after her talk with Susan, Dorothy walked about Champfleury saying to herself, “Why not?”

But she loathed the idea of leaving her cottage and her independence. Touraine had cast its glamour upon her. She had taken

root in its friable, fertile soil ; its sunshine had warmed her to the marrow when she had felt herself to be chilled for ever. She knew every soul in the small village. She had made friends with half a dozen pleasant families in the neighbourhood. Indeed, two men of position had formally demanded her hand in marriage. Briefly, she might reckon herself *bien installée*, with an assured position amongst very charming people. In Winchester she would have to begin all over again.

In the end, however, she returned to her native country.

With the assistance, effusively tendered, of Miss Mirehouse, the lease of a house near Winchester was taken over. It was a tiny house, but it stood in a pretty, old-fashioned garden, and hard by flowed the river Itchen. Dorothy felt that she must live near a river. After the mighty Loire the pretty Hampshire stream seemed but a rill ; nevertheless it also flowed to the sea, bearing with it Dorothy's fancies, her hopes and ambitions, fears, disappointments ; all that she was constrained to hide from fellow-creatures.

In fine weather, as had been her habit in France, she liked to sit by the stream, reading or reflecting. The running water was the medium by which she held communion with the larger world beyond.

The parson and the parson's wife called, and then, in due course, others who heard

that a young and charming widow had taken Rosemary Cottage. In the cathedral close, in scholastic circles, in the mess-room, around the dinner tables of august county magnates, gossip trifled with the name of Armine. The dean put the question concretely: "Who was *Mr. Armine*?"

Miss Mirehouse replied: "The father of that darling child, who has been entrusted to me." Society, urban and suburban, accepted this crumb in lieu of a loaf, but curiosity was only whetted. Dorothy's French frocks were too pretty to be quite the right thing; her manner, moreover, in a person about whom Mrs. Grundy knew absolutely nothing, was a trifle assured. She had certainly an—air. The wife of a minor canon whispered the word "dangerous." Another lady said that Mrs. Armine's French was *too* good.

It was, however, generally admitted that the newcomer's deportment and conversation with men, particularly with officers, were as they should be. A gallant colonel described her as "cold as the Rocky Mountains." She refused invitations to dine out, and was seen but seldom at luncheons and teas. Children worshipped her; and she gave a most successful children's party.

Sooner or later she knew that she would have to dissemble. The day came when an indiscreet neighbour asked outright:

"Was *Mr. Armine* in the Service?"

"No," said Dorothy calmly. Then she added with a composure slightly overdone: "I never speak of—of Min's father. He left me to explore a wild country, and there he was attacked by some savages—and—and——"

"My dear, say no more. How very terrible!"

"I shall never forget the moment when the truth was at last established."

"I see that I have distressed you, but may I, as your friend, repeat what you have told me?"

"Please do," said Dorothy.

"People are so——"

"Aren't they? Well, tell them I am the only daughter of a doctor, that I have hardly any relations, that my income is six hundred a year, that I don't mean to marry again, that I am a supporter of Church and State, and——"

"The most devoted mother in Hampshire."

"Yes, you can add that."

She laughed lightly. The neighbour repeated the story at a score of tea-tables, with only reasonable embellishment. Mrs. Armine's heart was buried with what was left of a massacred explorer. She had *eight* hundred a year, and could be counted on for subscriptions to Church charities.

More than once Dorothy met people she had known during her London days, but if they eyed her keenly, they failed to recognise her. She had changed. And nowadays memories

are short: we see too many people, hear too many people: the sensitive plate of the mind becomes blurred. Her own relations were buried in East Anglia. Sir Augustus had broken down in health; Lady Helmingham nursed him devotedly; Amy and her Teddy divided their time and attention between the nursery and the kennels. Somebody had said that they owned the handsomest terriers and the ugliest children in England. In short, of the people she had known intimately, Dorothy now knew no one except Lady Curragh. After that lady's return from Australasia, she and Dorothy met regularly. The meetings were more or less secret, because of Master Min, who, it was agreed, must never know the truth concerning his birth.

"He is mine," said Dorothy, "mine."

"Certainly he is yours now, but oh, Dorothy——"

"Well?"

"When I think of you buried alive——"

"Do I look like that?"

"You look astonishingly well and young."

"I feel young and well. My dear Moira, don't worry about me. I am happy—happier, much happier, than most of the married women I know. I wish we could meet oftener; that I could visit you and you visit me, but it's too dangerous."

This was said in a small room overlooking the Thames, after a delightful afternoon spent

upon the river. Dorothy had just settled down into her cottage.

"It would be dangerous," Lady Curragh assented, "because *he* comes to my house."

"Dick?"

"Yes. And his wife."

"Tell me about them."

"If ever a marriage was a failure! She's left the stage: a mistake that! Hard work is what a woman like her needs. Dick is making a fortune and she's spending it. He doesn't seem to care what she does. She's always been fiendishly jealous of him, and she has an awful temper. There are no children. He owns three important newspapers, and when his party comes into power he will get whatever he asks for."

"I am so glad."

"That he has been so successful, or that the marriage has—Well, I won't say it, but if you saw her complexion you would be sorry for him. Dorothy, he has spoken to me of you."

"And what did you say?"

"I am such a poor liar."

"You underrate yourself, Moira."

"I said that you were living with your little boy in the south of England. I let him think that you made an unfortunate marriage, quarrelled with the Helminghams, and are now a widow."

"You are much too modest about your powers of dissimulation," Dorothy sighed;

then, with a faint blush, she asked: "Did he say anything?"

"Nothing worth repeating."

"Moirá, you are indeed a poor liar. Now, tell me exactly what he said."

"If you will have it—he is as impulsive and expansive as ever. He must have been a manly boy, and he will always be a boyish man. He rushed into marriage as he rushed off to Africa."

"He tried to find me, when he got back?"

"If you had not buried yourself in France—! Oh, the whole story is such a muddle!"

"The beginnings of most lives worth the living are muddles."

"I have nothing of the philosopher in me. Sometimes I think you must have been a tiny bit—cold."

Dorothy laughed.

"Men can't stand that," said Lady Curragh. "I couldn't have let him slip through my fingers as you did."

"And what would have become of Min?"

"We can't go into that."

"But we must go into that. If it had to be done all over again, I should do what I did. Nothing else was possible—for me. Now, let's talk of something else."

It was after Min began to attend Miss Mirehouse's day-school that he asked the first question concerning his sire. Urchins are

fond of boasting to each other about their fathers. Min had a friend, a certain Billy Parflete, whom he asked permission to present to his mother.

"Mummie, he's awfully decent, and perfectly mad. If I might bring him home next Saturday."

"Certainly."

"I hope you won't mind red hair."

"On the contrary, I admire it."

"His father is a banker. Was my father a banker?"

"No."

"What was he?"

"An—explorer. By the way, Min, I bought some acidulated drops for you this morning. They are in the drawer of my writing-table."

"Oh, Mummie, how decent of you!"

He ran off. Dorothy sat with a slight frown puckering her smooth forehead. The wedge had entered her heart. Upon it Min would hammer ruthlessly. She might distract his attention a score of times, but he would return, again and again. That very evening, at tea, he continued as if there had been no break in the talk.

"What is an explorer, Mummie?"

"Min, you mustn't speak with your mouth full."

The boy swallowed his bread and butter.

"Now, Mummie, what is an explorer?"

She told him. At once she perceived that

his imagination had grappled with her explanation. He was keenly interested. Authoritatively, he announced: "Billy is going to be a banker, I shall be an explorer."

The idea obsessed him for a week. Pressure was brought to bear upon Master Parflete, who incontinently chucked his prospects as a banker, and swore to consecrate his life to Darkest Africa. Min and he made wonderful lists of such things as explorers might reasonably hope to bring home to their mothers. One will suffice as a sample. Dorothy put it away in her desk:

550 birds of paradise.
 1,000 elephants' tusks.
 1,000 lions' skins.
 75 necklaces of grizzly bears' claws.
 A lot of gold dust in a sack.
 One stuffed savage.
 One stuffed giraffe.

The stuffed savage was part of Master Parflete's spoil. Being perfectly mad—as has been said—he insisted upon that, and even went so far as to assign it a place in the hall of his father's house. Min added the giraffe out of exasperation, because Parflete would not give way about the savage.

The result of this you can divine. Min asked endless questions. His father became flesh and blood.

"Was he very brave—my father?"

"Very brave."

"And handsome?"

"Very handsome."

"Could he fight like wild cats?"

"Yes, in a just cause."

"Was he ever afraid of being left alone in the dark?"

"When he was a tiny mite he may have been."

"I don't believe he was; I'll bet he wasn't. You was, once, wasn't you, Mummie?"

"Yes."

"O' course. I get that from you. I wish father wasn't dead. Did you love him more than you do me?"

Dorothy hesitated before she answered the question.

"The love I had for him was different," her voice shook slightly, "and I loved him, Min—loved him and lost him before you came."

"I 'spect God sent me to make up."

"Yes."

He regarded her attentively, but said nothing at the time. That night, when she went as usual to kiss him in bed, he flung his arms about her neck and hugged her close. In England he had grown less demonstrative. Now the passion of his embrace almost startled her.

"I'm going to be just like him, Mummie; and I'll love you even harder than he did. Poor little Mummie!"

She lay down beside him and held him in her

arms. When she got up, he said in a quavering voice :

“ Please blow out the night-light.”

“ But, Min, you know——”

“ Blow it out, Mummie.”

After it was blown out, he said : “ To-night, just for once, if you'd play the piano downstairs——”

“ Of course I will.”

“ Something gay, Mumsie.”

Dorothy went downstairs and played two polkas and a valse ; then she stole up again. Min was fast asleep. But, by the shaded light of the candle she carried, Dorothy could see that his lashes were wet. And she knew that his tears had been shed for her out of the purest love that is to be found on earth. She knelt down, and thanked God because this love had been given to her.

After this incident ,Dorothy determined to make substance out of shadow ; to re-create, for Min's benefit, Min's father. She was fully sensible that however devotedly a boy may love his mother, he models himself and his conduct upon his father. Billy Parflete, for instance, insisted upon adopting a very slight limp, because the banker's right leg was made a shade shorter than his left. He loathed his own red, curly locks, because his sire's were a deep brown ; and he tried to speak in a deep bass voice when he was alone with Min.

And so it came to pass that during this first

year in England a very glorified father was created for our hero. In short, to know the late Mr. Armine, as his son learned to know him, might be described indeed as a liberal education. The hypercritical will infer that Dorothy overdid it. Let us admit this candidly. Will any one be so lacking in charity as to blame her?

CHAPTER IX

FATHER AND SON

By this time Dorothy had begun to believe that Miss Fairfax had disappeared from the earth. She had made new friends, created new interests, had adapted herself to her English surroundings with the same facility with which she had settled down at Champfleury. Being a creature of sympathies, she was able to find friends and interests in unlikely places. She had inherited from her father an inordinate appetite for ministration. To read aloud to a tiresome old woman, to soothe a fretful child, to carry a smiling face into stuffy, squalid cottages, became a pleasure, never a bore. "You are entitled to no credit, my dear Doll," said Moira Curragh. "You do these horrid things because you like to do them, because to leave them undone would make you uneasy." Dorothy laughed and admitted that her friend was more than half right.

Occasionally, not very often, she ran up to town. Lady Curragh and she would meet at the National Gallery, lunch together at some quiet restaurant, and spend the afternoon in Regent's Park or upon unfrequented reaches

of the Thames. When Min recovered from the measles, Dorothy took him for a fortnight to Margate, where Lady Curragh joined them.

"Here," said Moira, "we shall be perfectly safe."

It never struck Dorothy that other people might come to Margate to escape meeting the men and women of their own set.

Towards the close of this Margate visit, Moira Curragh went back to town, and Dorothy was left alone with Min—now ten years old—and the faithful Susan. Solomon, alas! was no more, but before his decease he had stamped his image upon a son, who answered to the name of Benjamin because he happened to be the favourite of a litter.

Dorothy, accompanied by Benjamin, was strolling upon the sands, listening to the niggers and enjoying the humours of a Saturday-to-Monday crowd. She was feeling not only extraordinarily well, but suffused with a sense of contentment. Min had recovered his health and his spirits. Susan Judkins had regained a temper sorely tried during Min's three weeks of illness. Moira Curragh had left behind her, as she always did, an invincible conviction upon Dorothy's part that life in the gallimaufry of Mayfair was not worth the living. The simple mirth of the trippers was also a factor in her sense of well-being. The old men and women seemed to be enjoying themselves as much as the children. Middle-

aged matrons were paddling in the wavelets ; a grandfather was drawing squeaky, plaintive notes out of a penny whistle ; a very ancient dame in rusty black alpaca was placidly absorbing what is known as "hokey-pokey" at one penny the glass !

Dorothy attracted some attention and a few remarks not uncomplimentary. If she happened to speak to a child, she was invariably addressed in turn as "miss." Moira Curragh had made a few comments :

"Of course you know, Doll, that although you are burning with a mother's feelings, you don't quite look the part. I might pose as Cornelia, but you are still the sylph. It is exasperating, because I would give all my diamonds if I could squeeze into your frocks."

"All the same, I feel older than you," Dorothy replied.

Walking now along the beach, she was reflecting that she was old. Her intercourse with Crystal, her perception of the facts of life, of elemental, primal life, her adoption of Min, had been paid for by the sacrifice of youth and youth's charming illusions. More, the conviction had been forced upon her that the position of spectator in life's comedy or tragedy was hers by divine assignment. Many young women come to this same conclusion without Dorothy's excuse for it, and most of them, like Dorothy, have that same conviction as rudely shattered.

For, looking up, she met a big man face to face.

It was Dick Gasgoyne.

The effect of this meeting was most plainly shown upon Dick, who, possibly, had never trained himself to disguise his emotions. Each recognised the other instantly, and simultaneously. Afterwards, Dorothy often wondered whether or not she would have evoked sufficient strength of mind to turn aside and let Gasgoyne pass, had she seen him first.

"Dorothy." He held out his hand; his voice trembled.

"Dick."

"And, by Jove, that is Solomon!"

To cover his emotion, for he had flushed deeply, Gasgoyne bent down, as soon as he had released Dorothy's hand, to caress the terrier. Benjamin, a dog of intuitions like his distinguished father, and like him also hypercritical in the choice of his acquaintance, welcomed Gasgoyne as if he were a long-lost brother.

"He knows me," said Dick with a laugh.

"Good Solomon! Good, faithful dog!"

"Solomon is dead," said Dorothy gravely. Her voice sounded cold.

"Dead?" repeated Dick.

"Ten years have passed."

"So they have."

"But dear old Solomon lives again in his son."

As the word "son" passed her lips she remembered Min, who at this moment might be coming with Susan to meet his own father. Her cheek paled.

"We must have a talk," said Gasgoyne abruptly. "I want to hear all about you—everything. Come!"

His voice had the same masterful, vibrating ring, but the ten years had not dealt too kindly with him. His black hair was as thick as ever, but grizzled. About his eyes and mouth were many lines.

"Is Mrs. Gasgoyne here?"

"Crystal? No. Crystal is not here. I am alone. That is to say I was alone."

She followed him obediently and in silence. It is not easy to find a secluded spot in Margate at three upon a midsummer's afternoon, but the overcoming of difficulties was Gasgoyne's business and pleasure. He left the sands, crossed the shingle, ascended to the parade, and hailed a small carriage.

"But, Dick——"

"Get in."

The driver asked for directions.

"Drive into the country," said Dick.

"I beg parding——"

"Into the country, if there is a country."

"Right, sir. I'm a bit 'ard of 'earing."

Dick smiled as he helped Dorothy into the ramshackle vehicle. She had wondered why he had chosen the worst-looking cab on the

rank. Now she understood. Dick had picked out a stupid, stolid coachman on purpose. His cleverness in this trifle brought back the old Dick with astonishing vividness. It was not remarkable that such a man had succeeded greatly. She decided that Dick, having, so to speak, selected the line of country, must pilot her across it. She would follow his lead. He said nothing for a minute at least; then, with his usual abruptness, he murmured in a low voice :

"I know this much: you married a man called Armine; you have a child, a boy; Armine is dead. Lady Curragh refused to give me your address."

"Moirá is a good friend."

"All the same, there was no reason that I could see why we shouldn't meet."

"That you could see: perhaps not."

"Do you know that I hunted all England for you when I came back?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you don't know," his voice was very sharp, "that I found you."

"You found me?" she echoed faintly.

"Do you think I was the man to stop looking till I had found you? Yes; I tracked you to Touraine."

"And you never spoke to me?"

He laughed harshly.

"No; I bolted. Being a woman, I suppose you think I ought to have dropped in to tea."

You were Mrs. Armine, with a boy; that was quite enough for me." He paused for a moment; then in a different tone, with an inflection of his old geniality, he continued: "Doll, bygones are bygones, but you didn't give me a square deal. However, I'm not going to reproach you."

"That is very kind."

He looked at her so sharply that she realised how carefully she must disguise even the inflections of her voice. Living at Champfleury and near Winchester had slightly blunted her weapons of fence.

He continued decisively: "I had to record my verdict, that is all, but for the future——"

"Well?"

"Doll, in the old days we were not only lovers, but friends. I want a friend."

"You are making an offer of friendship?"

"Please call it a renewal."

"I live in a tiny cottage in the south of England; you have just taken, I hear, a sort of palace in Carlton House Terrace."

"What of that?"

"Oh, everything—or nothing."

"And I am told the Helmingham people——" he paused. Then he added in a different tone: "They cut me, too."

They stared at each other in silence. Dorothy had to pinch herself to make sure that she was not dreaming. Was it possible that Dick was sitting beside her? She saw that he

had grown rather gaunt. Prosperity had not fattened him. Then she felt his hand upon hers.

"Doll," he whispered, "why did you let me drop out of your life? Was it because of Crystal?"

She released her hand. Faint colour flowed into her cheeks as she replied: "Crystal had something to do with it."

"If you had cared as I cared——"

She laughed for a second time. Gasgoyne frowned heavily.

"Oh, you women!" he said scornfully.

It was one of the hardest moments of her life. Very slowly she turned her eyes away from his, and looked seaward. He perceived that she was deeply moved. Was it by regret? Her weakness appealed to him enormously. In a different voice, he continued: "I beg your pardon, but it has always puzzled me why you, being the woman you are, were in such a hurry."

"A hurry." She repeated his words mechanically to gain time to adjust her thought. So much hung upon each word.

"Why, yes; you must have married Armine almost at once. Do you mind speaking of him? I want to hear all that you care to tell me. I am looking forward to seeing your child. If I had a son——"

The eagerness in her face startled him, as she asked almost breathlessly:

“Is that a great grief? You wish for a—son? You?”

“Am I a monster that I should not wish for a son? If I had children——” He checked himself suddenly, closing his lips with an effort that did not escape the woman watching him. In his eyes lay a look of hunger, quite unmistakable.

“If you would rather not speak of Armine——”

Dorothy answered hastily: “There is so little to tell.” Hitherto, she had skirted Truth, had salved her conscience with the poor ointment of evasion. It had been nothing to her that the gossips at Champsfleury and Winchester had placed the wrong construction upon her statements; it had been something that no actual untruth had passed her lips. Some intuition had warned her that if Gasgoyne were told the truth, his love for her, only scotched not killed, would revive intensely magnified, omnipotent, irresistible. His Cæsarean attitudes had not suffered diminution, you may be sure. What he had lost in youthful beauty, he had gained in strength. His glance, the grasp of his hand, the power which emanated from him even in repose, made her tremble. A few minutes ago, she had reckoned herself old, a looker-on at life, with all a bystander's indifference, or shall we say calmness. Now, she was swept away by stampeding thoughts, by the sense of her own weakness and inexperience.

In a low voice, to the accompaniment of the rattling of the little carriage, she said deliberately:

"You spoke of my people cutting me. Why should they cut me?"

"That is what I want to know."

"So clever a man might guess."

"You married what the good Helmingham folk would call beneath you, eh?"

She drew a deep breath. Gasgoyne, naturally enough, would ask question after question, keeping her on the rack. How could she stop him? She perceived clearly one way out of a brambly thicket of fibs and evasions. She took it with almost desperate eagerness. Blushing, she whispered piteously:

"Yes, I did. Oh, Dick, don't ask me any more questions. I can't speak of Min's father even to you. Let the dead bury their dead."

"If this man were not dead, I—I——" She felt that Dick had grown rigid. "Perhaps he treated you badly, neglected you. What was he like?"

"Perhaps Crystal would have said that he was not unlike you."

It was the only taunt that passed her lips. It did its work. Gasgoyne stood up and touched the driver's arm.

"Turn back," he said. "And drive faster."

"Thank you," whispered Dorothy, wondering why he did not get out and leave her. He answered the unspoken question almost immediately, as if he had divined her thought.

"I want to see the child."

"Why?" He noted the quaver of fear in her voice.

"Why? Because he is yours. Is not that a sufficient reason coming from me? Do you think that I am going to behave as your people did?"

"Then——"

"I feel myself responsible for what has happened. If I'd obeyed my instincts, if I'd stayed in England—— Let me finish! I know what men and women are. I'm supposed to be one of the iron pots, but there are times when even iron melts, and because it is iron and heavy it sinks the deeper. How you must have suffered! And yet, to-day," he regarded her keenly, "to-day, you look the same Dorothy Fairfax: the sweetest, purest, kindest girl in the world. Well, it's a mystery; but I know—I know, I repeat—that I'm partly responsible for this. I left you alone when you most needed a friend. Dare you deny it? Look me straight in the face, tell me you never cared for me, that you were fooling me, and I'll walk out of this trap and out of your life. Now!"

He fixed his eyes upon hers, exacting the truth. She wondered whether she ought to lie, but the lie would not pass her lips. Her faculties reeled, and she was within an ace of fainting outright.

"I am answered," said Gasgoyne triumphantly. "You are right; let the dead bury

their dead. I am your friend, and shall be your boy's friend."

Min was digging upon the sands, watched by the faithful Susan, when Dorothy appeared. At once she despatched the ancient handmaid to the hotel. She felt that it was impossible to take Susan into her confidence till a certain time had elapsed. Also, she feared that Susan might protest, and protest would be exasperatingly futile. Gasgoyne would have his way. She had left him on the parade promising to return with the boy.

Min's feet had to be dried and his stockings and shoes put on. Dorothy explained that she had met a friend who wished to make his acquaintance.

"And, of course, Min, you will behave nicely, and not talk too much. You see this is an old friend who knew me before you were born."

"Is he a man, Mumsie?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad. I like men."

She tried to smooth his hair, which escaped in thick curls beneath his hat. He wore sailor clothes: blue serge trousers and a white jumper. His skin was burnt brown by the sun; his eyes sparkled with health and vivacity. Dorothy wondered whether she could have been prouder of him had he been in very truth her own son. Then, quite suddenly, her heart seemed to stand still. She had forgotten the likeness

between father and child. If Dick should see what was so plain to her——! Ah, that was not likely. In any case, the risk must be run.

They moved slowly through the crowd of trippers, Min hanging back to listen to the chorus of the latest "coon" song. One of the minstrels, catching sight of Min's glowing face, made comical grimaces. The boy laughed joyously, entering easily into the humours of the scene, acknowledging the appeal of mirth and holiday-making.

"He made a face at me, Mumsie; wasn't it friendly of him?"

"Very friendly."

"Susan says all these niggers are white men."

"Yes; they're not so black as they paint themselves."

She laughed; Min looked up into her face with a slightly injured expression.

"Have you made a joke, Mumsie? I don't see it. Tell me."

"You wouldn't understand what I was laughing at, Min."

"You might let me try," he protested.

A minute later, Gasgoyne's piercing eyes were upon her and the boy. He greeted Min gravely, placing his hands upon the boy's shoulders, constraining him to meet his glance. Min gazed frankly and seriously into the face of his mother's old friend.

"How do you do, Master——?"

"We call him 'Min.'"

"Shall we sit down?"

There was a bench close by, and the three sat down upon it. Gasgoyne stared hard at the boy.

"He reminds me of somebody," he said, "but not of you," he turned to Dorothy.

"Mumsie says I'm like my father."

Again Dorothy blushed. She told herself angrily and with humiliation that she was behaving like a schoolgirl. Fortunately Gasgoyne would put his own interpretation upon these exasperating blushes. He did not appear to notice them, for he still stared meditatively at the boy.

"Father was big, and brave, and handsome, and good—like you," he added.

"How do you know I'm good?"

"You're Mumsie's friend?"

"Just so. What a convincing reply."

Suddenly he picked up Min as if he was a small puppy and placed him on his knee.

"We are going to be pals," he declared.

"O' course," said Min. "What am I to call you?"

"Uncle Dick, if you like."

"That will do very well," said Dorothy hastily. Again she was struck with Gasgoyne's quick wit in concealing his name. And her sense of his cleverness was even more deeply enhanced when he began to talk

to the boy easily and naturally. Undoubtedly, he wished to give Dorothy time to regain her natural colour and self-control. Min prattled away gaily; Gasgoyne felt his sturdy little limbs, his firm muscles. Dorothy knew what was passing in his mind: that he was wishing that such a son had been given to him. If he knew——?

At the same instant, the terrible question presented itself: Had the moment come when she ought to tell him? And if she told him everything, would he take Min away? All her plans began to crumble. Heretofore, her decision to keep Min's birth a secret from his father had been bolstered by a score of reasons too obvious to be recited. Who could doubt that in keeping the child she had acted in the child's best interests? And Dorothy was of too practical and sensible a nature to regret the past. Right or wrong, she knew that in so far as a mortal may she had done what she conceived to be her duty. Evil, not good, had urged her once to take Min to Gasgoyne.

But now the conditions were entirely different.

As if in a dream she heard Gasgoyne talking to his son. They had reached the inexhaustible subject of school life.

"We have great fun. One fellow, Billy Parflete, has a glass eye. And he slips it in and out. The other morning old Mirehouse caught us playing catch with it."

"Did she confiscate the eye or merely tell its owner to mind it?"

"She gave us lines, but she laughed; she's not a bad sort, old Mirehouse."

"Is Billy your chum?"

"Yes. He's quite mad. Nobody knows what Billy will do or say next. He doesn't know himself."

"How exciting!"

"Isn't it? He has red hair and freckles. The other day you'd have simply died of laughing. Billy's grandfather is nearly stone deaf."

"Afflicted family, the Parfletes."

"Aren't they? Billy's father has one leg shorter than the other. But the grandfather has a long ear trumpet. And Billy loathes speaking down it, because he never knows what to say. Just before I got the measles, Billy's grandfather came to Miss Mirehouse's to see us, and old Mirehouse told Billy to say something interesting to the old gentleman. And what do you think he said?"

"I can't imagine."

"Before all of us too," Min chuckled. "Why, he said quite clearly into the trumpet: 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' You see, he's quite mad, isn't he?"

"Quite," Gasgoyne assented. He glanced at Dorothy. Her face looked pale enough now, and about her mouth were lines of pain. Gasgoyne lifted Min from his knees, and stood up.

"Let's do Margate properly," he proposed. "Then tea, eh? Tea—and shrimps. Come on!"

"There's a merry-go-round," suggested Min.

"Thank you for mentioning it. We'll have a turn at once."

Min seized his hand, and the three set off; surely the strangest trio in all Margate. A delightful hour to Min followed. Gasgoyne entered into the fun of the fair with the vivacity and enjoyment which brought back to Dorothy the hours of their engagement. Gasgoyne's laugh was as ready, as cheery, as of yore. When she looked at him, her heart beat, her pulses thrilled. They visited the shooting galleries, where Gasgoyne's performance with the rifle filled the small boy with awe and ecstatic admiration. Then there was a punching pad, the lifting machine, the ascending block of wood, all of which registered in large black letters the result of physical strength. Min screamed with delight when Gasgoyne smote with the wooden mallet, and the ascending block struck the bell at the top of the pole.

"You're the strongest man here," he said. "Isn't he?" he appealed to the old woman, who was scooping in Gasgoyne's pennies.

"Of course he is," she replied; "and you'll be as strong some day, my little gentleman." She looked at Dorothy, then at Gasgoyne.

"The very image of his pa, too, if you'll excuse me, ma'am."

After a shy at the cocoa-nuts, they had tea in a shelter overlooking the sea. Min, without invitation, climbed on to his new friend's knee, and, being tired, and also somnolently full of shrimps and brown bread and butter, fell asleep.

"Put him down," said Dorothy.

"No. What a jolly little chap it is," he sighed: the sparkle died in his clear blue eyes. Then he added abruptly: "My God! to think that he might have been ours."

"Don't!" Dorothy murmured.

"I pitied you half an hour ago, my poor Doll, but now I envy you. You are on the sunny side of the hill. Tell me of your life."

She described the trivial round, not without a certain humour: imitating one or two neighbours upon whom the moss grew thickly and verdantly. Unconsciously, each assumed the intimacy of old days. Once or twice Gasgoyne interrupted her, catching her unspoken thought, forestalling her words in that fashion so delightful amongst sympathetic friends. Then, sensible that she was letting herself go, that the old intimacy was as strong, possibly stronger than before, she paused and said with slight confusion: "That is my life; and I enjoy it. What is yours?"

"Mine?" he laughed grimly. "I have my work; it interests me."

After a significant silence, he continued in a slightly different tone: "Why should I pretend with you? Outside of my work, in which I

have had the luck to succeed far beyond my deserts, I am nothing, a cypher!"

The distress in Dorothy's eyes made him mutter half an apology.

"It had to be said. In the old days you could draw the very heart out of me with a glance, and, by Jove! you can do it still. I've never whined to anybody else, but somehow I had to tell you."

"Why did you marry Crystal?"

At last the question was out: the question she had put to herself a thousand times.

"Why?"

"Shush—h—h! Speak lower!"

"Why? Because you'd thrown me over. A fool's reason. When I crawled away from those devils in Africa, more dead than alive, what gave me strength? You. If it hadn't been for you I'd have died half a dozen times. But I hung on. Doll's waiting for me, I said. When I got back to Sierra Leone, I cabled to you. The cable never reached you. When I reached England, the first thing I looked for was a letter from you. You were never out of my head, night or day. Ask the pal who nursed me whose name was on my lips. Yours. Of course I knew that you had heard I was dead; but I would have staked my body here and my soul hereafter that you were still waiting——"

She turned aside her wet eyes.

"When I reached England, I found you had disappeared. You were not dead. I asked

myself why you had cut all threads between us, because I found out that you had slipped out of sight before my reported death. Was there any answer but one? You had no use for me. Do you remember my letter to Solomon? Did you get it?"

It lay in her desk at that moment, between some pressed flowers that he had given to her.

"Yes; I got it."

"And yet you ask why I married Crystal. Well, Crystal loved me, and had remained faithful."

Dorothy shivered. The desire to speak, to justify herself, to tear the scales from this man's eyes, overpowered her. Then she heard his voice softened once more, full of tender familiar intonations.

"And then Crystal told me about the child——"

"About the child?"

"I dare say that was what decided you to form other ties. Yes, she told me how you had come to her, all you had done. Then, when I heard the child was dead——"

"What! The child—dead?"

"Didn't you know? Didn't she tell you?"

"No."

"The subject is a sore one. It died, poor little thing. I wanted, after our marriage, to make a sort of pilgrimage to its grave, but Crystal is perfectly miserable if it's mentioned."

"I see."

"All the same the child brought us together: a sort of invisible bond."

He sighed, moved impatiently, and immediately Min woke up. For an instant he was plainly puzzled to find himself in the arms of a stranger."

"Mummie!"

"Here I am, Min."

"Oh, it's Uncle Dick. I'd forgotten." He rubbed his eyes. Dorothy rose.

"We must go back to the hotel. Thank you for a delightful afternoon."

She spoke composedly, conscious that Min's eyes were upon her face.

"Have you a headache, Mumsie? You look tired. Good-night, Uncle Dick—and thanks awfully."

"Hold on," said Gasgoyne. He suddenly realised that they were escaping; he did not even know their address in Margate. "We must make plans for to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" repeated Dorothy.

"I invite you both to a picnic."

Min clapped his hands.

"Mumsie, won't that be simply splendid? You are a nice Uncle Dick."

"But——"

"I insist. I leave in the afternoon. Don't refuse! What difference can it make?"

With some hesitation, impelled partly by Min's entreaties, Dorothy consented to name time and place. Gasgoyne entered both in a

small notebook. Then he took leave of them, and walked swiftly away. Min gazed after him, eyes and mouth agape with admiration and affection.

"He is just right," he declared. "You know, Mumsie, I shouldn't have minded a bit if Uncle Dick had been my father. Mumsie!"

To his surprise, Dorothy had picked him up suddenly and hugged him. Such a demonstration from an undemonstrative woman startled the child. But he returned her kisses with ardour.

"If, if, Min, Uncle Dick had been your own father, do you think you would have loved him more than you love me?"

"Never, Mumsie," he replied sympathetically; "never! O' course, I couldn't love any one as I love you."

She felt his hot little lips upon her cheek and was comforted.

CHAPTER X

MIRAGE

AFTER Min was in bed and asleep, Dorothy told the faithful Susan what had passed. Somewhat to her surprise, Susan betrayed neither astonishment nor regret.

"I knew you'd meet, sooner or later, and I knew that woman was a liar," she said calmly.

"Susan, if you could have seen father and son together—! And all the time, something was urging me to tell him, and if I tell him, will he take Min away?"

Susan considered. Age had not blunted her tongue or her perceptions.

"He might take him away," she said presently. "Anyways, you can't afford to run no risks, ma'am." Her thin lips tightened. "It's rather late to speak now."

"He's rich. He could give Min what I can never give him."

"Can he give him a mother's love and tenderness? Not he. Master Min is yours, Miss Dorothy; my mind's clear on that. If ten thousand fathers wanted him and could give

him the world and the glory thereof I'd send 'em all packing."

"Mr. Gasgoyne is not very happy at home."

"He told you that? Then I think very little of him. I'm an old maid, but I know something of men. He'll be asking you to be extry kind to him."

"Susan!"

"Yes; I'm Susan; and I've served you for thirty years. He oughtn't to have said that. Did he ask questions? Did you have to——"

"I stopped his questions. He is not likely to ask any more."

"Oh, isn't he?"

"And after to-morrow we shan't meet again."

"Then you are meeting to-morrow?"

"For the last time."

"And you think you know Mr. Gasgoyne?"

Susan sniffed very aggressively, but Dorothy remained silent. Later, when Susan was brushing her hair, she said lightly: "You have a conscience, Susan?"

"Yes, ma'am; I hope so."

"And it is clear on this point? Min is mine, not his?"

"I say that the child belongs to the woman who saved his life before he was born, and has been an angel of love and tenderness to him ever since."

"These are sweet words, but you are pulling my hair horribly."

Susan faced her mistress, brush in hand.

She waved it dramatically, as if it were a sword.

"You asked me if I'd a conscience just now; a nice question, too. Well, it is my conscience or my commonsense that tells me that the worst as could happen to Master Min would be to learn that you wasn't his mother, and that she, that heartless, lying woman, was! Fancy his being told that all these years you'd been pretendin' with him?"

"Pretending?"

"He'd think it that. It's my belief you're thinking at this moment more of Mr. Gasgoyne than of Master Min."

There was so much truth underlying this that Dorothy winced.

Next day dawned clear and warm. A light breeze tempered the heat of the sun and dimpled the smooth surface of the sea. Dorothy and Min bathed early; a quick dip before breakfast. After a disturbed and feverish night the salt water acted upon Dorothy as a sort of miraculous tonic. She got out of bed tired and spiritless; hardly able to respond to the boy's wild manifestation of delight because the weather was so fine. But she came from the sea a young woman, sanguine, laughing at the fears of the previous night, and the jeremiads of Susan Judkins.

At breakfast Min said:

"Oh, Mummie, how nice you look!"

"Do I?"

"Your eyes are lovely. And the sun seems to have got into your hair. Mine is so beastly sticky; but then you don't wet yours, do you?"

"No."

"I daresay you wish to look your very beautifullest to-day, to please Uncle Dick."

"Min, you men are all alike; you think we women make ourselves look nice only to please you."

But she blushed as she spoke, because she had been more than usually careful to keep her hair dry.

At the hour appointed Gasgoyne drove up in a carriage and pair. Inside were two hampers.

"How many people have you asked to lunch?"

"Two," he replied promptly, "but to me those two are a big crowd. Besides, this is a special occasion."

He laughed gaily, conscious perhaps that he also was looking and feeling his best. Dorothy found herself admiring his general appearance of maturity lightened by the inherent boyishness which would be his if he lived to become a centenarian. The sun brought out every line upon his face, but these, she reflected, were the scars of a fighter, of a conqueror.

"You look stunning, Doll; doesn't she, old boy?"

Min, delighted at being addressed as "old boy," responded fervently. Susan came out

carrying wraps ; Gasgoyne shook her by the hand and inquired after her health.

"You've not forgotten me, Mrs. Judkins?"

"You're not one as is easily forgot, sir," replied Susan grimly.

Disapproval of the jaunt expressed itself in firmly compressed lips and hair drawn tightly back from the temples.

"What a fine day we have!" continued Gasgoyne.

"Fine enough, sir ; we'll hope it will end as it's begun. Shall I put in an umbrella, ma'am?"

"Certainly not," said Dorothy. "The sight of it would remind me that it might rain."

Benjamin expressed sympathy with this sentiment in a sharp bark. He had jumped into the carriage as soon as it arrived, sitting up on the front seat begging. He wanted to make sure of his invitation.

"That tyke makes me forget everything," said Gasgoyne.

Susan sniffed. "He makes me remember everything," she muttered to herself, as she went back into the hotel.

They drove off, very gaily, to the accompaniment of a piano organ and Benjamin's barks. Passing down the parade, every man, woman, and child who saw them smiled pleasantly. People go to Margate to enjoy themselves, and each individual pleasure party justifies itself as being part and parcel of the universal happiness.

"Really we are doing nothing more than our duty," said Gasgoyne.

He told Dorothy that he had heard of a secluded cove a few miles away, whither they were bound.

"I don't believe there is such a place," said Dorothy.

"Perhaps not, but if there is, our driver will find it, because a double fare hangs upon his discovery of it. This fellow is the guide, philosopher, and friend of all honeymooning couples."

"Dick, how little you have changed in some things."

"We are going to 'walladge' to-day."

The once familiar word brought a pang to Dorothy's heart and a question to Min's lips.

"What does 'walladage' mean, Uncle Dick?"

"What! You have never heard it! Why, your mother invented it only yesterday."

"Only yesterday?"

"I am sure it was only yesterday." He interpreted the word, explaining that it might be used in a mental and spiritual sense.

"You see we are going to soak ourselves in a good time."

"Uncle Dick, why didn't you come before?"

"What a fool I was not to."

Dorothy lay back smiling, well content that Dick and Min should sustain the talk. After all, how foolish it would be not to soak herself, like the other two, in this good time, which

might never come again ; for the night's vigil had bound with brass her determination to keep herself and Min out of Gasgoyne's way. They had met this once, like ships crossing in mid-ocean and bespeaking each other. Susan was right : for her to be seen in Gasgoyne's company was to court disaster.

They drove on through the soft summer air, with the sea sparkling on their right and the pleasant green country on the left. In the meadows the hay, just cut, lay in long lines to dry ; the scent of it floated to them mingled with the pungent odour of the sea. Big wains moved slowly across the fields, and the sound of the haymakers' voices alternated with happy intermittences of silence.

"Our driver is going to earn his double fare," said Gasgoyne. "It is hard to believe we are not more than five miles from Margate."

Presently, the road descended sharply, and they found themselves close to a tiny cove with brown spreading sands in front of it, and some trees bordering a small stream. The driver pulled up.

"Here ye are !"

They descended, congratulating their guide and themselves. The spot was charming, and within reasonable distance of a tavern where the horses could be baited. The hampers were carried to the trees and one of them unpacked.

"What can be in the other ?" said Min.

"If you survive the enormous luncheon you are about to eat, you will find out," said Gasgoyne solemnly. "Now then, you and I must wait upon your mother; she is the queen of the feast, and we are her humble slaves. Come on!"

Out of the hamper he pulled a bottle of champagne.

"There's ginger-pop for you, Min."

They laid the cloth, and set upon it varied delicacies, the best to be procured in Margate.

"Dick, how extravagant you have been!"

"Doll, the best in the world is not too good for us to-day."

"Mummie, we shall have the indigest," said Min. Then he added naïvely, "I don't mind. Susan says, 'Enough's as good as a feast'; but, oh, Uncle Dick, I have just wanted to try the feast once!"

"Give your mother some salmon and mayonnaise. I'm going to open the fizz."

The meal was a tremendous success. Dorothy said little, but a good listener in a party of three is indispensable. Benjamin attended strictly to business; he performed all his father's tricks and one or two of his own, cleaning the plates conscientiously without using either hot water or cloths.

"Benjamin is still hungry, Uncle Dick."

"Happy Benjamin!" murmured Gasgoyne. He lit a long cigar, and gazed steadily at Dorothy.

"Enjoyed it?"

Min answered incredulously:

"How can you ask such a question?"

"We have walladged," said Gasgoyne solemnly.

"But, Uncle Dick, what *is* in the other hamper? Not—tea?"

"No. Toys."

"*Toys!*" shouted Min. "Oh, Uncle Dick!"

The second hamper was unpacked with even greater enthusiasm than the first. It held priceless surprises: a model of a racing yacht, a knife, a small box of conjuring tricks, and a gun-metal watch. Dorothy protested, but Gasgoyne laughed cheerily.

"These are arrears; just arrears. The watch is a cheap one, Master Min; but it will teach you how to take care of a better later on. I daresay you will be able to sail your cutter on that pool over there."

The boy ran off, after thanking Gasgoyne effusively. The man laughed, looking at Dorothy with a twinkle in his eye.

"I hate to tell a youngster to make himself scarce," he murmured.

"You thought of that when you bought the boat?"

"Of course. Now, Doll, we can talk." But for a moment he regarded her attentively; then, in a different tone, he said quietly, "The possession of that jolly kid has made you a beautiful woman——"

"My dear Dick, don't let's waste precious time talking nonsense."

"I have learnt to detest mere surface prettiness, long lashes, regular features—— But you! Gad! you're a wonder."

"Dick, before the boy comes back I want to tell you that we mustn't meet again. I have thought it all out."

"So have I."

"And surely you understand——"

"That we are not to meet again? Certainly not. This is the first of innumerable 'wallyldges.'"

"It is the last," she said, with a shade of irritation.

Gasgoyne threw away his cigar, stood up, and came quite near.

"You were never a stickler for conventionality, Doll."

"Go on."

"That's it. I mean to go on, and I won't look back. I always try to profit by my past mistakes and the mistakes of others."

"An excellent recipe for success as the world measures it."

"Just so, as the world measures it; but I don't happen to use the world's footrule. At least, not in private. Do you know that I've enjoyed the last two hours more than any two hours I've spent since you and I parted?"

"I beg you——"

"I am stating a fact. You are clever enough

to draw the correct inference. I've worked like a slave, now I want to take it easy—now and then; not often, but once a month or so."

"You must have other friends?"

He shrugged his shoulders, smiling grimly. All the boyishness and gladness had faded out of his strong face as he stood looking down upon her. Of a sudden, pity for him flooded Dorothy's heart. She divined, as he knew she would, all that he left unsaid.

"I offered you my friendship yesterday," he continued. She confronted his glance with eyes as steady as his.

"You did, Dick. And I lay awake last night, thinking that it was the most unfriendly thing you could do."

"Why?"

"Because of Min."

He was quick to see the joint in her harness. "Oh, because of Min, eh? If it were not for Min, we might become friends again?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, I'll say this to you: if Min were my son, I'd do what I could for him, of course, but I'm hanged if I'd let him interfere with my own life and happiness."

"I see," said Dorothy thoughtfully. She heard Gasgoyne's rather impatient tones: "I have never quite understood you, Dorothy."

"That is perfectly true. Fortunately, considering that I am a woman, I understand

myself. My dearest friend never visits me in my own house; nor do I go to hers."

"You count Moira Curragh your dearest friend."

"She came to me in my trouble. You said just now that I was never a stickler for conventionality. But surely you know that the man or woman who strays a hair's breadth beyond the line which society has drawn must sooner or later be punished for being out of bounds. Perhaps my punishment is that now I must walk in chains because of my former freedom."

"You look as if you hugged your chains."

For an instant her eyes blazed: then the self-mastery of ten years came to her defence. She lowered her lids.

"I beg your pardon," said Gasgoyne, with real feeling. "I was a brute to say that; but it may serve to show you what a power you still have over me."

He took her hand and pressed it tenderly. It was a lover, not a friend, who looked deep into her eyes trying to read what message lay there for him. She released herself quickly; but he saw that she trembled, that she was frightened. Her next words, spoken on the impulse of the moment, confirmed this.

"It is you who have the power," she faltered. "Oh, Dick, be generous! Leave me in peace!"

"I have the power? You admit that?"

The gladness and even triumph in his voice

told her what a blunder she had made. Her teeth closed over her lip in annoyance. This was the result of living out of the world, in quiet places among quiet people who talked of their sport, their servants, their children, and what they read in a daily newspaper. He continued quickly, as if he wished to follow up an advantage gained—the natural instinct of a fighter:

“Doll, dear, I can't help thinking that you did in haste what I did. Great Heaven! you were not the sort of girl to wear the willow. You are flesh and blood, not an icicle. Because I was swept out of your life, you had to accept another man's love, a mate inferior to you. I know nothing about Armine except what the boy tells me; and you must have told him. He was strong, it seems, and brave, and handsome. But in my bones I know that you didn't love him as you loved me. Did you?”

She made no answer.

“I was the first,” he whispered.

“You are speaking like a madman.”

“Doll, did you love this boy's father as you loved me?”

She raised her eyes.

“Yes,” she said firmly.

He drew back. Something in her glance told him that she was speaking the truth. He shrugged his shoulders, and let a faint laugh escape him.

"You are right ; I have been behaving like a madman."

He walked away, turning his back upon her. She saw that he was only defeated for the instant, that he would return to the assault ; and her knees were as wax, her heart melting within her. If she raised her hand, he would be at her feet. And why not ? A sudden recklessness seized and shook her. The life she had found sufficient burst like a pretty toy balloon. She put her hand to her throat as if its petty round of small duties and amusements were strangling her. A vision of life as it might be lived with Dick arose like an exquisite mirage in a desert. In Winchester men and women eyed her askance. Her own people believed her to be a light woman. She had the name, and now the game itself was offered. Dick was rich, powerful, sure to succeed greatly anywhere. Under kindlier skies, in the colonies or America—

She covered her eyes. Dick was still increasing the distance between them. If he turned, he would read her and know.

"Mummie !"

Min, breathless and flushed, stood before her. Too excited to notice her agitation, he gasped out :

"My boat is sailing away, Mummie. I shall lose it. Uncle Dick ! Uncle Dick !"

Gasgoyne turned as Dorothy rose to her feet.

"We must rescue Min's boat," she said gravely. "Come!"

Min ran back, as they followed quickly. Dorothy said gently: "We ought not to have left him."

Gasgoyne met her glance.

"You do hug your chains," he said abruptly; "and your chains are his arms."

The errant boat was captured.

"I nearly lost it," said the grateful Min. "Oh, Mumsie, it was an awful moment, wasn't it?"

"Awful."

"You looked nearly as frightened as I was."

That night, when she bade him good-night, the child lifted his sleepy eyes to hers.

"Hasn't it been a perfectly splendid day?" he whispered. "But it might have been quite spoilt at the end, mightn't it?"

"Yes."

She answered soberly, knowing that the day had not been spoilt. For her was the sweet consolation of a child's kiss; but Gasgoyne had gone away frowning.



CHAPTER XI

SPECULATIONS

DOROTHY returned to Rosemary Cottage three days later. Gasgoyne left Margate for town upon the evening after the picnic. The question of a future meeting was not raised between them, but at the last moment Dick said: "You must let me see something of your boy. When he goes to a public school, I shall run down and tip him. I should like to give him his first gun."

"You mustn't spoil him."

"I am not likely to have much opportunity."

Then Dorothy answered nervously: "I would rather you did not mention to Crystal that you had met me."

"As you please; but why?"

"I am connected in her mind, oh! inseparably, with a part of her life she must wish to forget."

"By Jove! what a good sort you are! I thought—well, never mind what I thought. I'll say this: she's fiendishly jealous of my memory of you. All right, I'll hold my tongue. Good-bye."

Disagreeable months followed. Dorothy picked up old habits, old conventions, with the curious sense that they had grown stale and unprofitable. Mind reacting upon body produced a physical lassitude very hard to overcome. For the first time in her life she began to suffer from insomnia and headache. Her interest in reading grew attenuated. The written word seemed so trite, so cheap. Susan Judkins looked at her in pitying but discreet silence.

"She'll get over it," she reflected, "we all do."

In her youth Susan had kept company with a dashing artilleryman, who had forsaken her for an older and much plainer woman with savings. Susan had pined. She could remember perfectly that the taste went out of beef-steak pudding; but it had come back. The artilleryman took to drink, and her rival suffered blows and infidelity. And yet Susan was not as grateful as she should have been that she had escaped such a monster. In her hands he might have risen, not fallen.

Dorothy told Moira Curragh of her meeting with Gasgoyne, and of the picnic, but of what had passed between them—nothing. That astute lady drew conclusions from this silence not very wide of the mark. She had seen Gasgoyne, who had said much concerning Min and exasperatingly little about Dorothy.

This, also, was significant. Lady Curragh, however, was emphatic in applauding the

wisdom of keeping Min's true parentage a secret.

"He would give anything for a son," Dorothy had said.

"If he knew——"

"And he could give Min everything which I cannot."

"Ah, now, Doll, why put it in that way? Say to yourself that you give the boy all that he can't."

Dorothy did not mention that letters had passed between them. The first arrived about a month after the meeting at Margate, at a moment when she was feeling wretchedly blue and forlorn. In it Gasgoyne wrote nothing that might not have been proclaimed from the top of Winchester Cathedral; but the letter was so personal, so vivid a presentment of the writer—more of the trained writer—that Dorothy, after reading it, had felt that she had been listening to the man's voice. After some hesitation she answered it, stipulating that such correspondence should be intermittent. He did not write again for six weeks.

Often his name, and more often his wife's, appeared in the society papers. Dorothy was continually reading paragraphs about Mrs. "Dick" Gasgoyne. Her wonderful frocks, her jewels, her entertainments, were described at length. She had become a personage.

Upon this also you may be sure that Lady Curragh had a word to say.

"Dick doesn't care what becomes of his money. Why should he?"

Dorothy thought of Min.

She had signed a will, long ago, leaving her twenty thousand pounds to the boy; but, of late, realising how magnificently Gasgoyne could provide for a son, she had told herself that twenty thousand pounds was not much. She began to compute with misgiving college bills. Her savings amounted to little, so little that some imp of mischief suggested the expediency of increasing them by changing her investments. The head of the firm of solicitors who managed her affairs died about this time, and his son and successor agreed with his client that three per cent. was paltry interest. Acting under his advice Dorothy experienced the delights of a flutter. It happened that her adviser was in a position to know that Canadian Pacifics were likely to rise. They did rise to such an altitude that Dorothy made several hundreds of pounds.

This unexpected piece of good (or ill) fortune put to flight megrims and lassitude. The colour came back to Dorothy's cheeks and into her life, which had become a sort of interminable drab perspective. An acute intelligence rose in arms to vanquish the bulls and bears of the market-place. Her luck, at first, was quite amazing. She had taken her winnings wherewith to gamble and, leaving her original fortune intact, decided

to employ a regular broker. Most amateurs begin this way.

If she had told Gasgoyne, he would have nipped the bud of speculation with a few frosty words of commonsense. Naturally, she did not tell him nor any one else. Her transactions absorbed and amused her, but, so far as the business part was concerned, they exacted only a few minutes of time. She made no change in her life; although keensighted neighbours noted an improvement in her appearance.

It would be tedious and irrelevant to give details of this particular phase, which came, of course, to the usual and sudden end. Dorothy lost every penny she had made, and, in the effort to recover her winnings, half of the precious twenty thousand pounds. Then she realised her folly.

Her income being cut in half, she began to study seriously the art of cheeseparings. To many excellent persons this affords greater rapture than music, sculpture, or painting. A penny saved is not only a penny made, but also a coveted object added to an ever-increasing coin collection. In moments of depression, your honest cheeseparer can always hearten himself up by smelling and touching the parings. Dorothy, need it be said, had no such blessed consolation. She loathed her parings. She found herself blushing when she began to offer her friends milk instead of

cream with their tea; she actually shed tears when she found herself mending and remending Min's underclothing, now no longer of the best. But she faced the move from her enchanting little cottage to a semi-detached villa in Winchester with a valiant smile, imposing upon Min's credulity to such a stupendous extent that he told Parflete: "The mater really enjoyed it."

The move and her altered circumstances cost Dorothy more than secret pangs. She lost several acquaintances who made it a point of conscience not to call upon persons occupying semi-detached villas. Being a sensitive creature she felt this, although she scoffed at the deserters rather indiscreetly. A harder matter to bear was the patronising sympathy and pity of some of the wives of the clergy who lived in and about the Cathedral Close.

Upon the other hand, both Susan Judkins and Min behaved with exemplary fortitude and serenity.

"I lost the money gambling," said Dorothy to her handmaid.

"It was yours to do what you liked with, ma'am."

"It was Min's, Susan."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" exclaimed Susan, who with increasing years allowed herself greater liberty of expression. Then, somewhat shamefacedly, she added: "When I was walking with Alfred" (Alfred was the artilleryman),

"I lost four pounds fifteen a-betting on race-horses!"

"You, Susan!"

"Yes, *me*. Never, never, more than five shillings at a time, too. I felt rather sinful when the money was gone, but I've said since that anyway I 'ad my little bit o' fun."

Min offered his consolation.

"Oh, Min, I've lost a lot of money, and I'm going to turn into a horrid stinge."

Min looked serious, but not miserable.

"Mumsie," he declared, "you've often told me that nothing was really lost that might be found again. When I'm big we'll hunt for your money and find it, by Golly!"

Meanwhile, Min had been removed from Miss Mirehouse's select academy for children, and for some months had been attending an excellent school situated high up on Winchester Hill, where the fees, alas! were high also. At all costs, Min must remain at this school, whither Master Parflete, also, had been sent at the same time. The question now agitating Dorothy was: "Would Min be able to pass into Winchester as a Colleger?" Mr. Williamson, Min's master, said that the boy had the ability to pass any reasonable exam., but that his mind seemed to be set upon distinguishing himself at games rather than work. Still, he would do his best. Gasgoyne begged to take upon himself the cost of Min's schooling. "If I allowed him to do that, I

should have to tell him the truth," Dorothy reflected. She wrote, declining the offer with many thanks.

At this crisis in her and Min's fortunes, they made a new friend. The other half of the villa was occupied by a Mrs. Heseltine and her son, David, one of the masters at Winchester College. David was a tall, thin, quiet man, himself a Wykehamist, but one who, according to authority, had not fulfilled the promise of a rather remarkable youth. He had distinguished himself as Prefect of Hall, taking a scholarship at New College when he went up to Oxford, and, later, obtaining a Fellowship at Oriel.

Friends and contemporaries said that David had gone too fast at first. Certainly he moved slowly enough now, and spoke slowly, as if effort of any kind had become distasteful to him. Wykehamists, as a body, confessed that they could not understand Heseltine, but it was admitted that he was not to be ragged, or rather that it was not prudent to rag him, because, on occasion, he could move and speak with startling and disastrous alertness. He possessed, too, a certain Socratic acuteness in leading on men—Wykehamists are always men—to make fools of themselves, when he would smile, not unkindly, but with a sort of exasperating omniscience, as if he had seen motley long before it was made visible to other eyes. Knaves and fools gave him a wide berth.

Mrs. Heseltine, on the other hand, displayed

with pride the mental and physical energies which her son was at some pains to conceal. She was a small, brisk, indefatigable person, of a cocksureness in regard to whatever concerned herself or her neighbours which aroused amazement and, too often, resentment.

A source of unlimited amusement to Dorothy, who admired her sincerity, Mrs. Heseltine, from the beginning of their acquaintance, had said everywhere that Mrs. Armine was a charming and distinguished woman and the most devoted of mothers. When she repeated this in David's hearing, a twinkle might be discerned in his mild blue eyes, too heavily lidded to belong to a man of action. He knew that Dorothy's charm and distinction were synonyms for the tact and sense of humour which prevented her from contradicting his mother. He would have admitted, however, that her devotion to Min had captured Mrs. Heseltine's esteem and affection.

As time passed, Dorothy came to see a great deal of the Heseltines. She suffered at first from the lady's inordinate curiosity. Fortunately, this curiosity took the not uncommon form of asking more questions than could possibly be answered; fortunately, also, Mrs. Heseltine suffered from a slight deafness which, for the world, she would not have acknowledged. You will see, then, that a clever woman might take discreet advantage of these infirmities. Dorothy never forgot her

neighbour's first call after she had left Rosemary Cottage. Mrs. Heseltine bustled in at an hour when she was certain of finding Dorothy at home and alone.

"Well, my dear, so here you are! What a pretty paper! And not too expensive, I dare say? What? Eighteen pence the piece. Twelve, not nine yards, I trust. And chintz curtains to match it? No economy there, if they have to be calendered. You had to cut your carpet, of course. Heart-breaking, yes; and a lovely Axminster, isn't it? You have let your excellent parlour-maid go, I notice; Mrs. Judkins opened the door. Well, well, if what everybody says is true, I'm so sorry for you. What? My dear, I didn't say I *believed* what everybody said. And I told Mr. Dean that I was sure you would tell me the truth yourself in good time, and I'm not a sieve. You must let me help you. Economy is my *cheval de bataille*. I like to air my French with you, my dear, because you speak it so beautifully. You must have spent years and years abroad. What? Oh, oh, indeed! In Touraine, you say. Yes, yes, that is in the south of France, isn't it? I hope you weren't tempted to invest your money in foreign securities. The Funds are the only thing for me. What? You didn't. How wise! You will miss your pretty garden, but the look-out here is not without interest. One sees everybody passing. Really, I believe you can see more than I can.

Now, about this trouble of yours; you must let me share it. Not to-day, of course, but in due time, as I told Mr. Dean. I feel such a keen interest in unprotected women, because I was left a widow myself at an early age. Canon Heseltine died six months after my David was born. And your little fellow? Fatherless, too. But I never speak of these sacred things—except to my friends. Dear Mrs. Armine, I am sure you will regard me as a friend. We have so much in common, and living under the same roof. It is a tie. And you won't hesitate to practise the piano at any hour of the day or night? I have no nerves, thank Heaven! Yes; we shall be a comfort to each other. And if your little fellow should be taken ill, you'll call on me? I'm an excellent doctor. Ask David. He calls me a fuss-pot, but he thinks me perfect, dear man. . . ."

After the good lady had departed, Dorothy lay down for half an hour.

Further acquaintance, however, revealed Mrs. Heseltine as a gentlewoman, inasmuch as her curiosity stopped short of anything approximating malicious prying. She wished to acquire such information as she could lawfully come by, nothing more. She took intense pride in her own household management, and asked questions of others to find out, primarily, if they had succeeded in doing slightly better than she had done herself. She kept diaries

and account books. She could have told you in a twinkling what David and she had eaten for luncheon upon any day during the previous decade. Her two servants regarded her with awe, as possessing supernatural powers of divination.

But if Dorothy learned to know and like the mother within a few weeks, it took much longer before she could make up her mind about the son. She was sensible that David was watching her, as she, indeed, was watching him. They eyed each other with calm glances, trying to see beneath a too placid surface. David hardly ever spoke of himself. He talked of books and art. He was something of a naturalist and a fine dry-fly fisherman. But his accomplishments oozed from him imperceptibly. He never posed as the knowledgeable man, although his memory was encyclopædic. In his presence, Mrs. Heseltine would make occasional blunders; the son never corrected her, never disturbed her conviction that he—as she had put it—esteemed her perfection in all things. This, however, might arise from indifference or indolence. In the same quiet, nonchalant fashion, he paid his mother such attentions as woman rates highly. When she entered the room, he rose from his chair; when she left it, he opened the door. He asked for permission to read a note; he ran errands; he refused dinner invitations, because he was unwilling to leave her alone.

Dorothy, noting these details, could not determine whether she admired such politeness or not. Sometimes the word "pernicketty" occurred to her. Gasgoyne, so different a type, had inspired an admiration of qualities never to be stigmatised as "pernicketty." Comparing the two men, as she did more often than she was aware, Gasgoyne dwarfed Heseltine, and yet the seemingly weaker of the two had this singular virtue about him—he was a source of strength to others. With Gasgoyne, Dorothy was ever conscious of inferiority; Heseltine, on the other hand, inspired a conviction of power still latent, of possibilities, of there being a definite place in the world for her, which she alone could fill. In a word, he had the faculty of making others, most notably his own mother, believe themselves to be better—not worse—than they were. From the first he acquired an influence over Min, who was in slight danger of becoming a mother's darling.

"You think I spoil him?" asked Dorothy one day.

Heseltine smiled in reply.

"Perhaps he is too masterful. Isn't that a good quality in a boy who will have to make his own way in the world?"

"Yes; if he masters himself first."

"You see his faults plainly."

"Because, perhaps, they are only surface faults."

"I daresay I am too blind."

"No; but you are too—kind." He smiled again.

"But you like him?" He detected the note of anxiety; obviously Mrs. Armine wished him to like her son.

"Yes, I like him; he is not an ordinary boy. Curiously enough he reminds me of a friend. There is a physical resemblance, which is nothing, but there is also a moral and intellectual similarity, rather striking."

"I hope your friend succeeded; did well."

"Oh, yes," Heseltine replied reflectively. She noticed that he did not answer her question directly. "I have not set eyes on him since he left Winchester."

"Since he left Winchester?"

She divined the name of the friend in time to control her mouth and hands. Heseltine, however, was not looking at her; he was looking back, seeing his friend.

"What was your friend's name?"

"Gasgoyne. We were in College together."

"And you say you have never seen him since? But, surely, you have written—sometimes."

"No. He is a man of many friends, as the Spanish say; he dropped out of my life. I should not know him if we met. We do not march upon the same road; perhaps, really, we never did."

"If you would explain what you mean by that——"

"I have studied boys, Mrs. Armine. I notice that one of the subtlest forms of attraction in early youth is to be found in the affinity that establishes itself between contrasting characters and temperament. I was good at work; Gasgoyne was clever enough, but he devoted himself to cricket and football. I used to covet his successes, and I know that he coveted mine. There was no rivalry between us."

"I see. You spoke of contrasting temperaments. Did Mr. Gasgoyne covet your temperament?"

"I coveted his, *then*."

"Not now?"

"No."

At this moment, Mrs. Heseltine came back to them. Some detail of household management had called her from the room. Shortly afterwards, Dorothy took her leave. Alone, she underwent a reaction, was seized with a physical and mental rigor which left her spent and fearful. She had escaped detection so often that she had reckoned herself hardened to the possibility of it. If Dick had come to her—if David Heseltine had met him—

For the moment she was tempted to run away. Then commonsense told her that a danger marked plainly upon a chart loses three fourths of its terrors. In unknown waters lay, perhaps, hidden reefs upon which

she might be shattered irretrievably without warning.

Fortified by this reflection, she allowed her thoughts to return to Heseltine's first words: the ones he had spoken about Min. It came upon her with overwhelming force that the boy must have inherited from his parents much that was evil. Had she been too kind?

Min himself answered the question more than once during the following week. His master wrote to say that a little extra coaching would be required. A few hours of play during the forthcoming holidays would have to be sacrificed. Dorothy spoke of this to Mrs. Heseltine. Next day, David called upon her.

"Mrs. Armine, will you allow me to coach your boy these holidays?"

His abruptness startled her; his kindness and generosity warmed her heart. Seeing her embarrassment, he continued lightly: "I should like to do it. An hour, three times a week with me, and as much devoted to preparation. It is agreed, isn't it?"

"But——"

"You must indulge my whim."

"A whim?"

"Oh, as to that, if we analyse our motives, shall I confess that apart from the pleasure of doing you a slight service I am really keen about the boy himself, partly because he is such a cheery little chap and partly because,

as I told you, he is so endearingly like my old friend."

At this point, Dorothy said what she had carefully rehearsed. Min might speak of "Uncle Dick" to Heseltine; he had broken or lost the toys, but the memory of that happy day at Margate remained green with him as with Dorothy.

"Yes. Mr. Heseltine, it's rather an odd coincidence, but I know Mr. Gasgoyne and his wife."

"And his wife" was a masterly addition.

"It's a small world," said Heseltine quietly. His eyes met hers quite naturally, but she thought she detected a dim note of interrogation in their rather misty depths.

"Isn't it? And, although I had not seen him since I was a girl, I came across him some years ago. He was very nice to Min."

"You must let me be nice to Min."

"I should be a churl to refuse such kindness."

When she broached the subject to the young gentleman there were ructions. He grumbled and growled, wanted his holidays free, asserted that he had worked during the current term, that he was doing his best. Then, seeing a delicate frown upon Dorothy's forehead, he tried other methods.

"You darling little Mumsie, I shall get in all right. I know I shall. Parflete says it's a sitter for me."

"Mr. Williamson, I daresay, does not know so much about it as Parflete."

"It will be awful rot. I shall have the sulks, Mumsie; and you know you won't like that."

"I shall try to bear even them, Min; oh, my dear, so much depends on this."

"Mumsie, I'm not a fool."

"You are trying to make a fool of me. The matter is settled."

Dorothy put her foot down upon a squirming boy who was too astonished to protest further.

We will admit frankly that at this period of his life Master Min was bumptious. A great many foolish people told him he was handsome; some added that he was clever; he knew that he was strong, because he could hold his own with older and bigger boys. Williamson and Heseltine agreed that the young scapegrace was hard to deal with, inasmuch as his pleasant smile and genial laugh disarmed wrath and indignation. He had inherited from his parents an invincible optimism which is a gift indeed of the gods, provided always that it is not abused. Also, he possessed that other great gift, so seldom entrusted to young creatures, a sense of humour. He could laugh—and did—at a joke which told against himself. Everybody liked him, even Dumont, the French master. One day Min loaded a small cannon with gunpowder and blotting-paper, and fired it off in the unfortunate man's ear. To Williamson, Min explained: "Monsieur said he

had fought in the Crimea, and I wanted to see whether he could stand fire."

"I'm going to give him the pleasure of caning you," said Williamson.

But the Frenchman made Min feel cheap by letting him off the caning.

"*Mon enfant*," he said, "you will write out fifty times these lines from the immortal Victor Hugo: '*Quand je vois l'Angleterre, je suis fier d'être Français.*'"

Thanks to Dorothy, he had charming manners and consideration for others. He abhorred cruelty, had a mind as clean as his face, and was ever ready to take the side of the under dog in a fight. Therefore, it is hardly necessary to add that amongst his schoolfellows he was popular.

During the Easter holidays in which he was coached by Heseltine, he had his first serious love affair. A charmer with a tow-coloured pigtail, pink and white complexion and China blue eyes, led both him and Parflete captive. Parflete, being red-headed, had a right to consider himself inflammable, but he was chilly compared to Min. Dorothy had sympathy enough not to laugh at the boys, but she saw that the violence of Min's feeling was really amazing; and if love did these things in the green tree what would be done in the dry? A certain chill struck deep into her heart when she reflected that a little girl somewhere or other would live to take "her son" from her.

Towards the end of the holidays, pride had a fall. The tow-headed charmer dared Min to perform some absurd feat which ended in disaster. Parflete, who was standing by, desperately jealous, led Min home, limping terribly. The doctor said the ankle was sprained. The coquette who caused the mischief hastened away without offering her victim either sympathy or pity. Two days passed. Upon the morning of the third day, Parflete called to inquire after his friend's health, and was shown into the small drawing-room where Min lay a grumbling prisoner on the sofa. Parflete did not shake hands, but he came close to Min—Dorothy being at the other end of the room—and hissed out, melodramatically: "I saw Nellie this morning: she kissed me."

"What?"

"She kissed me—there!"

Then, as the furious Min slipped a sound leg off the sofa, Parflete turned and ran. Dorothy caught him at the gate outside. He looked very anxiously behind her, but she assured him that Min was still on the sofa and likely to remain there for another week.

"Why did you tell him Nellie had kissed you?"

Parflete, with a lively but shamefaced recollection of Dorothy's hospitality, hung his red head.

"If Nellie was kind enough to let you kiss

her, you oughtn't to tell of it. No gentleman kisses and tells. I'm ashamed of you, William."

"Well, I didn't kiss her, nor did she kiss me. No such luck. But I wanted to make Min mad. Nellie says she won't marry a man with red hair and freckles."

He ran off. Dorothy went back laughing; she found Min uttering strange oaths and hideous threats of revenge, but when he learned the truth, he admitted that Billy Parflete had scored.

"He had me, Mumsie. I wanted to kill him."

"Really, Min, you are too absurd."

"I wanted his blood; I did, I did."

Then she saw that he was pale and shaking. At once she recalled Crystal, the scene in the Doll's House coming back with extraordinary vividness. She had supposed that he was his father's son, all his, and suddenly the mother had been revealed.

CHAPTER XII

WAYS AND MEANS

WE regret to record that Min failed to satisfy the examiners. The failure was a grievous blow to Dorothy, because she had made certain that Min would get in easily. To accentuate disaster, the successful competitor who made least marks was coached by Williamson, and had been considered even by Williamson inferior in ability to Min.

When the list came out, Min tried to meet disappointment with a valiant smile. Heseltine, however, spoke some words that festered then and thereafter: words Min never forgot. The youth had rushed to Heseltine for consolation.

"I'm not in," he announced. "Isn't it beastly?"

Heseltine stared at a flushed face, a mouth still agape with astonishment.

"I'm very sorry for Mrs. Armine," he replied slowly.

"Aren't you sorry for me, too, sir?"

"No."

"But I worked——"

"At the last, yes. But—here, give me your hand."

He took Min's right hand, laying his own left hand upon the boy's shoulder, staring down into his eyes.

"For months and months you slacked."

"Sir!"

"Give me your word of honour that you didn't, and I'll offer sympathy, plenty of it."

Min's eyes fell. "Perhaps I might have worked harder at first," he admitted ruefully.

"Just so. You saw your mother pinching to pay your big school bills; you know that she prayed for your success night and morning for the past two years; yet you—slacked."

The contempt in his voice was the hardest thing to bear that Min had encountered. The flush died out of his handsome face, leaving him very pale.

"You hit me when I'm down, sir."

"Are you really down?"

Again his quiet blue eyes seemed to burn into Min's brain and conscience.

"You have robbed the best mother in the world."

"I shall live, I hope, to pay her back."

"There you go again with your confounded self-assurance. Live to pay her back! And you may be knocked on the head to-morrow. Pay her back—eh? How? Answer me. Well, you can't answer, because that question is unanswerable. Pay her back indeed! Can

you pay her back her sleepless nights, her innumerable little acts of self-denial? Oh, you boys, who think yourselves such splendid fellows; who take all you can get and give nothing in return, save, perhaps, kisses and words, both so cheap; who—bah! You make me sick.”

He turned abruptly, with a derisive laugh. It was the first time that Min had ever seen this quiet, undemonstrative man display his real feelings; and, listening to him, hearing his laugh, Min seemed to shrink and dwindle into nothing, as if Heseltine had pricked some gorgeous, gaily painted bladder, the counterfeit presentment of a jolly English boy. Min turned to leave the room, but his boasted strength failed him at the last moment. He fell upon a sofa and burst into tears; perhaps the first real tears he had ever shed. Lying face down, he felt Heseltine's touch upon his head, Heseltine's voice, quiet and kind as he had always known it, in his ear.

“Now you are down, my poor Min. Now I am truly sorry for you.”

While this scene was taking place next door, Dorothy was alone in her bedroom feeling very miserable. Min's special coaching had exhausted her income, and indeed left her in debt. To send the boy to such a public school as Winchester as a Commoner was utterly

beyond her means; to send him to a cheap school, or to educate him abroad, filled her with dismay.

She was looking at her bank-book when Susan came in.

"Lady Curragh is downstairs, ma'am."

"I had to come as soon as I got your wire," said Moira a minute later. "I knew how you'd be feeling. I shall go back this evening."

She was very plainly dressed, and wore a thick veil. At sight of her Dorothy melted.

"Doll, this isn't like you."

"You don't know what it means."

"I think I do, and that's why I came. You must let me help."

"Never!"

"Curragh insists."

"As if I didn't know that in his way he is as poor as I am. But you're both trumps."

"I'm sure we shall find a way out of the wood. How is Min?"

"Poor Min!"

"This may be the making of him. Doll, you must cheer up. And, after all, there remains his—father."

Dorothy met her friend's glance, realising that this had brought her from town. Lady Curragh continued quickly: "He offered to help before. It will be nothing to him. I can arrange it."

"You have seen him?"

"No."

"Moirá, I can't ask him. I can't! I can't!
If I did——"

"Well?"

"I should have to tell him all."

"And I have taken this very hot and dusty journey to say: 'Why not?' In my opinion you must tell him all now."

"Shush-h-h! Here's Min. Say something kind."

An instant later Min rushed in, halting in some confusion when he saw Lady Curragh, whom he was meeting for the first time since he was a baby at Champfleury.

"How do you do?" she said, faintly smiling, seeing his likeness to his father—the pose of his head, the set of his jaw—noting also the effects of recent storm.

"I am so sorry for you," she added gravely.

At this Min burst out, with his usual impetuosity: "I don't deserve it; I've been a beast. If I had worked properly at first; but, Mumsie, I've made up my mind, I——"

He paused, glancing at Lady Curragh.

"You can go on, Min. Lady Curragh is my oldest friend. She came here from town to sympathise with us."

"You won't have to pay school bills much longer," Min declared stoutly. "I'm going to sea. Heseltine says he can get me a billet in the merchant service: on one of the P. and O. boats."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy.

"P. and O.," said Min, with a twist of the lip. Moira Curragh looked at him with greater interest. Here was a youth who would challenge attention anywhere. Min continued: "I'm not going to sponge on you any longer."

"You mustn't talk baby-talk except when we're quite alone."

"All the same, I mean it. Heseltine—he is a real good sort is Heseltine—says that his uncle is a director or something. The thing can be worked."

"And what would she do without you?"

Lady Curragh indicated a very forlorn Dorothy. Min eyed her reflectively, then with the *naïveté* of youth he added quickly: "Mumsie 'll feel it frightfully, of course, just as I shall, but I have to paddle my own canoe; it's a little sooner instead of a little later, that's all."

"There is something in what he says," murmured Lady Curragh.

The appearance of Susan with the announcement of luncheon put a stop to further discussion. At the table Min recovered his spirits. Dorothy, however, sat silent, unable to eat, faintly smiling at the quips of her guest, who drew Min on to talk of his successes.

"I won the hurdles, the two hundred yards, and the long jump. That's some comfort."

"And you're captain of the eleven, I hear."

Dorothy sighed, with a sense of her own



impotence to present life to this youngster in its true proportion. Already he spoke of his small successes as if they counterbalanced his stupendous failure. His invincible optimism had become slightly exasperating.

"Those things don't count," she said impatiently. Then, to her surprise, Min exhibited humility.

"I've been an awful ass," he confessed. "Why do I see that too late?"

"Too late?" repeated Lady Curragh. "Rubbish! This failure must be a stepping-stone to success. I used to write that in my copy-book. How good this omelette is!"

Afterwards, as soon as the ladies were alone, Moira Curragh said emphatically: "He is a dear, Doll; and he adores you. I never saw a more attractive boy. Much too good for the merchant service. À propos, who is this Mr. Heseltine?"

"One of the Winchester masters. His mother and he live next door."

"I see," murmured the other, but she looked as if she didn't. Dorothy changed the subject rather abruptly.

"You and Curragh think I ought to tell Dick."

"We don't say 'ought.' But he is so rich."

"You always rub that in."

"Doll, if it came to a choice between Winchester and a P. and O. boat, eh?"

"The boy was talking nonsense."

"Was he? I don't agree with you. It is a way out, and a creditable way. I don't know that it isn't the very best way if you really mean never to tell Dick."

"Never?"

"Oh, my dear, it is now or never. You must see that. It would be so stupid to tell him later, when the opportunity of doing something vital had passed by."

"If he should take him from me——"

She stood up, her bosom heaving, her lips quivering with agitation.

"As if that is the least bit likely. She wouldn't allow that, I can tell you. She poses as a paragon of the virtues now."

"You don't understand. Dick would not take him away in that sense, but morally——"

"Morally?"

"Well, I have thought—Heaven knows I have had time to think!—I have thought so often of what would happen inevitably; yes, inevitably. Dick is a big personality. He would capture Min, enslave him. And his life, that luxury, that lust for power. And it's all in Min. I've fought against it. If I could only add that I had prevailed! But he is his son—and hers."

"And hers?"

"She crops out occasionally. Well, now you have seen him, you recognise that the right stuff is there for the making of a man. And it means so much, everything, to him

and to me. And you are right. If his father is to know of his existence, it is now or never. But I'm afraid ; I was never so afraid in my life."

"You have made me afraid too," said Lady Curragh.

They talked together for an hour without resolving the problem. Then Lady Curragh returned to town. At the last moment she said to Dorothy : "If you wish, Dick and you can meet at my house. It will be best."

"I'll write. It was awfully good of you to come to me."

But she did not write for nearly a fortnight.

During that time indecision tore her in two, while Min prattled gaily of P. and O. boats. He was very nice and tender to Dorothy, seeing the lines upon her usually placid face, and telling himself that he, the ungrateful pig and beast, had caused them, and that the sooner he found himself in his floating prison the better. Susan listened to him frowning, hearing the roaring gales and seeing waves higher than mountains.

"Susan, you look peevish," said he.

"I never did hold with sailormen," Susan confessed. "A wife in every port, they say, and more shame to 'em! If you love 'em they're always at sea, and if you hate 'em they're always ashore."

Meantime, you will guess that Dorothy was asking for a sign. Some women play Patience

to decide a matter in which the pros and the cons are equally balanced; many men toss up a sixpence. Finally, Dorothy received her sign, or what she interpreted to be one. Min, reasonably anxious to know something definite about his future, said suddenly: "If my father had lived, I wonder what he would have done with me."

"Your father? I dare say, Min, you think, with the vanity of your sex, that only men ought to determine these great issues."

"I was wondering what he would have decided."

"And if his opinion clashed with mine——"

"Mumsie, how funnily you say that!"

"You would have sided with him."

Min kissed her.

"No; I wouldn't, and you know I wouldn't, you rum little Mumsie, but I expect he'd have had his way. Parflete's father gets the best of Billy and his mother every time."

"Min, suppose I did ask for a man's advice?"

"What man? Not old Parflete. He's going to put Billy into the bank. There's Mr. Heseltine, but then he's a bachelor. Oh, I say, Mumsie, I've a spiffing idea: if you want advice from a man who knows what's what, and is a regular ripper, why don't you ask that friend of yours whom we met at Margate—Uncle Dick?"

There was a pause for a moment; then Dorothy said very quietly:

"You think that would be the wisest thing for me to do?"

"I'm sure it would."

"Then I shall do it."

Accordingly Dorothy wrote to Lady Curragh, and asked her to arrange a meeting. When the letter had been despatched she felt easier in her mind, but the thought of the coming interview drove sleep from her pillow. A worn and white-faced woman travelled up to town.

Min begged to be allowed to come with her, but she refused. Father and son would meet soon enough, and she dreaded Gasgoyne's impulses. Let him learn the truth and digest it before he acted on it.

In her dressing-bag lay the certificate of Min's birth and Crystal's letter. There had been moments when Dorothy had longed to destroy this evidence which proved that Min was not her son. In the event of her sudden death, Min might find it amongst her papers. What a shock to him! For poor Min was so absolutely certain that he was well born, although he was not snob enough to mention it, even to Parflete. But in a thousand little ways he had betrayed his pride in being the son of Dorothy and the man who was good and brave and handsome. Once he had said seriously: "You see, Mummie, I've been jolly lucky in having such decent parents. When I look at you and Mrs. Parflete I feel awfully sorry for poor Billy." He was old enough

now to make comparisons, and, indeed, Dorothy had trained him to exercise his budding powers of observation. When the "people" of the boys at his school came down to visit their sons, Min eyed them keenly; and he listened attentively to the evidence submitted by the boys themselves. "Mills has a beastly pater," he would confide to Dorothy. "He is a sort of swell in some government office, but he drinks and he bullies Mills. Mills is always glad when the holidays are over." Or the son of a sporting baronet might excite the following remarks: "Druce is a frightful sinner, and he knows it. Sir George is a reg'lar rip, and he married Druce's mother for her money. Druce knows it, because he says that Lady Druce never lets Sir George forget that. She rubs it in at breakfast, dinner, and tea. If I had had a mother like that, what should I have done?"

"I hope you wouldn't have criticised her with other boys."

"I hope not; but if I was the son of that sort of old beast, I suppose I should be beastly too."

Dorothy, you may be sure, pondered these *puerilia*, vowing to herself that Min must never know the truth, yet feeling in her heart that it would be revealed some day in spite of her precautions and self-sacrifice. It was, of course, inevitable that within the immediate future he should suspect that some mystery encompassed his birth and his reputed father's death. Already he asked questions very difficult to answer or

evade. One day he said: "Hav'n't I a crest? What is the Armine crest? Parflete tells me that all decent people have crests."

"I've never bothered my head about such things, Min. We'll hunt up a crest for you when you are entitled to bear one."

"Mrs. Parflete uses one on her notepaper."

Dorothy pounced on this with delight.

"Yes. Now, between ourselves, Min, I can tell you this much. I know just enough about heraldry to assure you that a woman can't bear a crest at all. Mrs. Parflete has no right to use her father's crest or her husband's."

"What a lark!" said Min.

But later, some months afterwards, he had returned to the charge with: "I say, there are some Armines living in Worcestershire, and I expect they're relations of mine. Tompkinson junior's pater shoots with them."

"Does he? Well, perhaps you may shoot with them some day. I never heard your father mention these Worcestershire Armines."

"Hang it! I wish we had some relations," said Min, with an odd glance at Dorothy.

Travelling up to town she recalled his innocent questions.

What, however, lay uppermost in her mind was the fear that Dick might resent her long silence, might upbraid her, deeming himself wronged and defrauded. He had ever held fast to what he reckoned to be his own, had fought for it—fiercely. He might be terribly

angry. Setting, perhaps, an extravagant value upon Min, she was unable to appraise his value from Dick's point of view.

Lady Curragh received her, and presently Lord Curragh came in—a tall, robust Irishman, with all the geniality and expansiveness of his race. Dorothy had not seen him for fifteen years, and the change in him was rather startling.

"I'm glad to see you here," he said, adopting the slight brogue which he used with his oldest friends. "It's as bald as a coot I am, but the house is the same, and the people in it are proud to welcome George Fairfax's daughter."

He raised her hand gallantly, and kissed it.

The three lunched together. Gasgoyne's appointment had been made for half-past two. He arrived punctually and asked for Lord Curragh, who had given orders that he was not at home to any other caller. The gossips below stairs would think that the great man had come on business. He was ushered into the library connected by folding doors with Lord Curragh's private room.

The moment was an awkward one. Dick advanced slowly to greet Lady Curragh. Dorothy laid down her coffee cup, but remained sitting till the servant had left the room. She had not seen Gasgoyne for more than four years; and at once she was struck by the change in him. He seemed to have grown older and harder. His face had that set, impassive expression which journalists describe

as "Sphinx-like." He moved rather ponderously, the pose of a man reckoned to be solid in the world's market-place.

Dorothy rose to play her part in the comedy, but when she felt the familiar clasp of Dick's hand, something seemed to come into her throat. Afterwards, Moira Curragh told her that she looked composed and at her ease. Inwardly, her pulses throbbed riotously. Gasgoyne turned from her to shake hands with his host. For a couple of minutes the men talked apart.

"Come into the next room," whispered Lady Curragh, leading her away.

"I am so nervous, Moira."

"We shall be near you. As soon as it is over I shall take you for a drive."

She kissed Dorothy's cheek.

"Moira——"

"Yes?"

"If he should be furious——"

"Bah! It's not that I'm afraid of."

"Don't go yet! What are you afraid of?"

"Doll, dear, you must be adamant, if——"

"If he claims Min?"

"Don't be stupid! If he claims—you."

Not waiting for an answer, Lady Curragh went back to the library. Dorothy could hear her clear tones and then Dick's growl, which seemed ominously threatening. Then the door between them opened and shut quietly.

Dorothy was alone with Min's father.

CHAPTER XIII

CÆSAREAN

GASGOYNE was the first to speak, and his voice indicated a self-possession which obviously he wished to communicate to Dorothy.

"Doll, you look horribly worried. Well, you've sent for the right man; I'm going to take this worry off your face and hands at once."

"Thank you, Dick."

"Tut, tut! Bless me, you're trembling; you mustn't let things upset you so. I don't. Nothing upsets me now, not even the new colour of Crystal's hair."

He looked at Dorothy kindly, but his laugh rang false; and the woman, watching him, divined that her first impression was correct: he had grown hard. Would he be hard on her? With his usual quickness he guessed part of her thought.

"Do you see much change in me?"

She hesitated.

"The truth, please!"

"Dick, you look as if you had hardened yourself against people."

He laughed again, with a curious note of complacency mingled with derision.

"Doll, you read me easily. Yes; I'm pretty tough, the Lord be praised!"

His voice softened delightfully, as he continued: "You're worrying about the boy. By the way, how is he?"

"He's very well."

"Jolly little cove! Let me see—his name?"

That he should have forgotten his name came upon her with a shock.

"George. We call him Min."

"Yes, of course; Min. I think I've guessed your reason for seeing me. I offered help after that little flutter of yours, and you refused it most unkindly. Now, I hope, you've changed your mind, eh? And you mean to give me a great pleasure. I know what your feelings are exactly. In my way I'm as proud as you, as unwilling to accept assistance from others; but, Doll, I've had to take it often, and sometimes I've not been able to make any return. Once a man who befriended me at an opportune moment died before I could even thank him. I was greatly in his debt. Now, in helping you and your boy, I want you to feel that I'm paying my debt to that man."

It was delicately said, but Dorothy was miserably sensible that the speaker took an honest pride in his generosity. Always he had been a liberal giver of money and money's equivalents. That his pride was about to be

humbled she knew also, and shrank from inflicting the blow. Being a woman she tried to temper its severity with words.

"Yes; it is about the boy."

He took her hands, pressed them kindly, smiled encouragingly, and led her to the sofa, seating himself beside her.

"Dick, before we speak of Min, I wish to tell you something about Crystal."

"Crystal?"

At once his face hardened.

"What I am about to tell you, you must keep from her."

"Of course." He laughed scornfully. "You don't think that I prattle to Crystal about other people's affairs."

"Perhaps not; but this is peculiarly her affair."

"Her affair?" His interest became more acute.

"Yes. Oh, Dick, you mustn't judge her too harshly; you must try to remember that she loved you, and was prepared to make any sacrifices to win you back."

"Can't we cut this?"

"No."

The decision of her reply startled him. For the first time he looked upon her with an entirely different expression. He boasted that he was generally the first to discern a cloud in his sky.

"All right, but please get to the point."

"Min is not my own son. I adopted him. I never married."

"What! You are not a widow? Armine was a myth?"

"I am still Dorothy Fairfax."

"Go on," he said hoarsely. She saw that he was about to swoop on the truth.

"When Crystal believed you to be dead, she placed her baby in an institution for nameless and fatherless children. Afterwards, she was almost forced to tell you that the baby died; but it lived."

"Christ in Heaven! Min is her son!"

He spoke with conviction, rising in terrible agitation. Dorothy rose also, trembling, and yet confronting him with an indescribable dignity.

"Min is *my* son," she said simply, "in everything except the tie of blood. I adopted him according to the French law, and I have tried to be a true mother to him ever since, for your sake and for his own sake—so help me God!"

"You have been faithful to me always?" He almost choked.

She smiled tenderly.

"Always." Then, very clearly, she told him the story. When she had ended, he sank back into his chair, covering his face with his hand. She saw that he was grappling with her words, straining, so to speak, his inward vision so as to perceive the truth more clearly. She knelt down and touched him.

"You are not angry with me?"

"Angry with you?" He sprang up. Then she saw that tears were in his eyes. "Angry with you," he repeated. "Would you like me to go down on my knees and tell you what I think of you?"

"I was afraid you would resent my keeping him to myself."

"As if I cared tu'pence about the child; he is nothing to me, nothing; you are and always were—everything. My God! What a woman you are! And I believed ill of you, I——" He broke off with a laugh and a shake of his shoulders, as if he was trying to shake off for ever the incredibly wrong impression he had conceived of her. Then, in a different voice, he added: "The irony of it eats into my marrow. Angry with you? Great Heavens! You have done more for me and mine than ever woman did before: renounced love, reputation, friends, family, for my sake; and you ask if I am angry!"

"You wanted a son, so you told me."

"If he had been ours, but he is hers."

"You won't take him from me?"

"Of course, you love him; better perhaps than you loved me." He eyed her jealously.

"Dick, you must put such words and thoughts from you. Try to remember that for fifteen years he has been all the comfort I have had. Oh, you will be proud of him yet!"

"He stands between us," said Gasgoyne grimly. "I see obstacles clearly, Doll, when

I'm face to face with them. I told you once before that you hugged your chains. This boy has taken my place in your heart. If it were not for him, I'd make you forget, make myself forget, the years that the locust has eaten, but this boy prevents."

"And Crystal," she added steadily.

"Crystal! You are right. I had forgotten Crystal."

She came a step nearer.

"Dick——"

"Well?"

"Because chains, as you call them, have been placed upon us, because we did not make them for ourselves——"

"We did make them, and that's why I want to strike them from us, if I can."

"But you can't."

"All the same I shall try. Did you suppose that you could tell me this, and that it would end here? Why did you tell me? I forgot. The boy again. You want me to help him, to give him the right start. So be it. I charge myself with everything. I'll settle on him to-day, to-morrow, the ten thousand pounds you lost on his account. He shall be rich—my heir, if you say so; but, understand, I do it for you, Dorothy, not for him; for your son, not for mine. I do not admit his claim upon me for such advantages, but you——why, all I have is yours."

"I want him to go to Winchester, although he

has not worked hard enough to win a scholarship, as you did."

"Agreed."

"Afterwards, the University, or the Army."

"Anything you like."

"And, he must never know that Crystal is his mother."

"Eh? Why shouldn't he know? He's old enough to know."

"Oh, Dick, is any boy brought up as he has been old enough to learn that he is basely born? It would nearly kill him. And I—I want him to believe always, but always, that he is my son."

"He is never to know his father?"

"It seems too much to ask."

"That depends——"

"On what?"

"On your powers of fibbing for one thing; on the chance of your not being recognised as Dorothy Fairfax for another; on the good faith," he sank his voice, "of our kind friends here; on your old nurse's discretion. Experience tells me that the odds are greatly against any secret being kept that is shared by more than two persons. I see a better way."

"Yes?"

"Is it necessary to stand glaring at each other as if we were enemies instead of friends? Sit down!"

They sat down upon the sofa. Gasgoyne took her hand for a moment, patted it with

a gesture he had used when they were lovers, relinquished it with a reluctant sigh, and said quietly :

“ I shall begin with a confession of faith. I hold that each man is intended to be the architect of his fate. In that sense I don't quarrel with the orthodox interpreters of the doctrine of free will. I believe also in the forgiveness of sins, and in the communion of saints. I should be a better fellow living with you. For the rest, Christianity, as it has been revealed to some excellent persons, has not been so revealed to me. That may be my fault, but I'm telling you exactly how I feel. As for the conventions of society, I support them as necessary for the civilisation in which we live. They are, and always have been, and always will be, subject to modification, and to exceptions. We happen to be exceptions.”

“ Dick, I know what you are going to say. It would be so much wiser and—and kinder not to say it.”

“ I must say it,” he replied sharply. “ We are exceptions, you and I, inasmuch as we have the intelligence to break the law, so-called, without injury to the commonwealth for whom that law was framed.”

“ Dick,” she looked into his eyes, “ you swore before God and man to be true to your wife. You are about to ask me to help you to break that oath.”

“ Yes; I swore to love, honour, and cherish

Crystal: Crystal who lied to me, Crystal who married me under false pretences, Crystal——” He broke off suddenly. Dorothy saw the passion rising in him, and wondered at her own calmness. Before, at Margate, her pulses had thrilled, her knees had trembled. She had known herself to be as clay. Had she changed? Or was it the potter whose power to mould had departed? He continued in a quieter voice:

“Dorothy, are you going to dismiss me again? God forbid that I should reproach you for what you have done, but when you let Crystal stand between us you allowed sentiment to overpower sense. My connection with her was the inevitable result of the artificial conditions under which we moderns live. Between her and me—I swear this to you—the connection was regarded as temporary, as all such connections are. She deliberately wrecked our happiness, and you let her do it, because there is too much angel in your make-up.”

“If she had killed herself, or——”

“The threat of a clever actress! But I'm willing to argue the case from your point of view. If she had gone to the devil by a short cut or a long one, do you dare to affirm that any law, human or divine, would have held me responsible? She drove me from her. If I had wrecked her life, which I did not, was that a reason for wrecking yours?”

"How hard you are!"

"Yes, I am hard; but, oh! how soft I'm going to be to you."

"Min lives."

"The boy? Yes, yes; we always come back to him. He lives. And your coming here to-day proves that I am necessary to him, that you and he want the protection of a man. But you propose to play the ostrich, bury your head in the sand. Mark my words: the boy will find out everything."

"No, no."

"He will, as sure as fate. And I say better now than later. Doll, my dearest, have you not considered him enough, won't you do something for me?" The harshness went out of his voice. "If you knew how I want you— You admit you loved the old Dick. He was rather a cock-a-hoop, bumptious ass—that old Dick who walked into this room a few minutes ago. You've taken the starch out of him. Doll, give me a chance to make up to you for all you have suffered. Look here, I've a little plan: Let us be seen together in Paris, or where you will. Crystal will do the rest. When she has divorced me—not till then, I swear—you will be my own wife, and I can force the world, if you care for the world, to acknowledge you and honour you as such—Dorothy!"

The reproach in her face staggered him. She faltered: "And I asked you to help me."

He kissed her fiercely before she could

prevent him, and said with the brutality of a strong man :

“Answer that !”

She released herself quickly, but with a certain dignity. Perhaps at that moment, for the first time, he recognised her superiority, and could measure the distance between them. Morally speaking, as well as physically, he had, in a sense, looked down upon her as being a woman and, therefore, necessarily the weaker. His appeal to her weakness, and her answer, revealed his own. A peculiar radiance shone in her eyes, as if for the moment some subtile emanation of the spirit triumphant over the flesh had made itself visible. She gazed at him with a pity which pierced, with a sorrowfulness of regard which purged.

“Oh, my poor Dick, why do you destroy yourself in the eyes of the woman who loves you ?”

His eyes brightened.

“You do love me ? You admit it ?”

“My love has never failed. You must know that. Have I not given proofs ?”

“It is not the world you are afraid of, you ?”

“No.”

“Is it your religion ? You were never a Puritan.”

She made no answer. He guessed that she realised the fatuity and futility of trying to impose her convictions upon one who a

moment before had repudiated such feelings. But he chose deliberately to misinterpret her silence.

"I don't believe it is your religion which keeps us apart. At Margate"—he saw her wince and pursued his advantage—"at Margate, Doll, your religion did not keep you from me. It was the boy; I saw it. First and last my son has cut me out."

"If I said that he was part of my religion——"

"Eh?"

A new note in her voice challenged his attention.

"He is part of my religion. I wonder how many women there are in the world to whom God has been revealed in the face of a child. I will tell you something. When I heard of your marriage, my heart seemed to turn into a thing of horror. A devil got possession of me. I made up my mind to inflict the torment I suffered upon you and her. And I had my weapon: the child. I was tempted—ah, God! how I was tempted!—to take the child to both of you—you were on your honeymoon—and fling it and its story and my story in your faces. For I hated you and her, and the child because it was yours."

If he had ever doubted her capacity for passion, for intense feeling, those doubts fled before the flash of her eyes and the thrill of her voice. Only a woman who had loved with

overpowering strength and fidelity could speak as she was speaking.

"And what prevented me?" she continued in a gentler tone; "what drove out my devil? The child. The helpless child. Why? Because some Power greater than the evil in me looked out of his baby eyes. He reached out his tiny arms to me who hated him, and at his touch I became whole. So I say that your son is part of my religion, but he is more. I loved you, and I love you still, I must always love you, and I love him passionately; not only because I have nursed and cherished him, but because you, the best part of you, live again in him, and to watch the growth of what is fine and noble in him has been my joy and solace. And now you ask me to destroy my work. Let me finish. If I obey you, and obey the lower half of my own nature; if, to use your words, we are exceptions to a rule, can we keep what we have done secret from him? Impossible. Sooner or later he will know us for what we are—creatures of the flesh; and, despising us at first, he may end by following our example and sink lower than even we have sunk. Yes, you are right; it is not the world, nor the saving of my own soul, which keep us apart, but your son."

She turned from him and went to the window, but he noticed that she trembled and moved with difficulty. For a reason which physiologists may partly account for, this

evidence of weakness moved him more profoundly than her strength.

"Dorothy——"

"I can bear no more ; you had better go."

"Yes ; I will go. You have—conquered, even if you have not convinced. As for the boy, I'll do what I said and more ; anything you like. Good-bye."

His abruptness startled her, bringing a flush to her cheeks. She held out her hand, which he held for a moment, and then dropped with a sigh. As he was leaving the room, by the door which opened into the hall, she called him back. Her voice trembled, her bearing and gestures betrayed her nervousness and distress. She laid her hand upon the sleeve of his coat.

"Dick."

"Poor little woman !"

"You—you say that you will do—more ?"

"Yes, yes ; anything——"

"You don't understand. The 'more' will be a greater thing than the signing of cheques. You are sure that one day your son will know that you are his father. Oh, Dick, if that day comes, let him find his father the man I have described him to be."

"I see." He smiled derisively, lifting his dark brows. "You are indeed asking for 'more,' much more than I can promise. I am to behave myself—eh ?—so as to be worthy of—of Crystal's son !"

"It is cruel to say that."

"I wish to open your eyes to the fact that I have only a half interest in this young gentleman who is to be a paragon of all the virtues. I am the good, generous, noble fellow, am I? Well, all the newspapers controlled by me say so, so it must be true; but Crystal——"

"Dick, Crystal must never know."

"I sha'n't tell her, you may depend on that."

She heard his firm tread in the hall, and the slam of the front door. Then, after a few minutes, Lady Curragh came into the library. She kissed Dorothy and looked into her eyes.

"Is it well?" she asked.

"Not with him, Moira."

CHAPTER XIV

OLD FRIENDS

GASGOYNE, on leaving Lord Curragh's house in Curzon Street, hailed a hansom and drove straight to his solicitors. Certainly, a factor of his success was the habit of doing whatever he had promised to do without hesitation and circumlocution. Within an hour, he had made arrangements to settle upon Min ten thousand pounds, the interest to be paid to Dorothy during the boy's minority. Then he walked to his splendid offices in Norfolk Street; but before entering the great building he paused to survey it—the monument of his energy, capacity, and untiring industry. To many men—and Gasgoyne was of such—stones are more eloquent than popular preachers. It tickled Dick's vanity to think that the Gasgoyne Building would endure when he was dust; that in it, issues vital to the empire would have their birth; that from it, as from the vast establishment in Printing House Square, would fulminate messages that might shake the spheres, that had shaken them already.

He passed into his own room, where he found his secretary and an editor, both eager

to communicate some political news. Gasgoyne listened to them abstractedly, nodding now and again, but making no comments. As a rule, questions would pour from his lips. Silence seemed almost confounding. The editor glanced at the secretary.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked his chief.

"Have I heard anything?" He laughed. "Yes, I have; but it's not for publication. As for this matter, you must deal with it. Oh, don't bother! I give you a free hand."

"It is of the first importance," murmured the editor.

"Is it? The more credit to you if you handle it properly." He nodded carelessly, dismissing the editor; and then, turning to his secretary, added, "I don't wish to be disturbed for an hour."

The men went out at once. The editor murmured to the secretary:

"Never saw him look tired before. What's up?"

"Row at home, I expect; but he's accustomed to that."

Left alone, Gasgoyne sat back in his chair, closing his eyes, evoking the scene, carefully analysing Dorothy's words and their import. He told himself that he had been premature in his proposals, that he ought to have listened to her, sympathised more fully about the boy, and thereby paved the way to

another meeting. He had rushed in like a fool, and he was not a man to suffer gladly folly either in himself or in others.

Thinking of Dorothy, his face gradually softened, the hard lines fading out of it. What an adorable creature she was! How tender, true, and kind! With her at his side, what might he not achieve? He had loved her after she had made him believe that she had formed other ties; now his love increased enormously as she shone, radiant and immaculate, out of the shadows which for so many years had obscured his vision.

"She is mine," he reflected triumphantly; "she has always been mine." Then, frowning, he began to compare her with Crystal, who had lied to him, who had abandoned *his* child.

Before the honeymoon waned he had measured his blunder, although pity and sympathy remained. With what admirable art she had played her part! And because he, too, was smarting under the scourge of fate, because the loss of Dorothy appeared too great to be computed, he had credited her with like sensibilities and capacities for suffering.

An actress—and nothing else!

But there was something else. She had loved him. Her love, it is true, was almost invisible now: overlaid by a morbid jealousy so intense, so firmly rooted in an obstinate and narrow nature, that he had long ago realised the utter hopelessness of trying to eradicate it.

During the first year of their marriage, when he hardly looked at another woman, this absurd jealousy inflamed itself against his men friends, his business, his ambitions. At the time, he was so sorry for the poor creature that he surrendered his will to hers to such an extent as to make himself ridiculous. This happened before she left the stage. Perhaps he had blundered also in urging her to give up her profession. He smiled grimly when he reflected how sedulously she had cultivated her art since her retirement. Society—the actors, musicians, painters, and philanderers—who drank his champagne and paid court to his wife were unanimous in declaring Richard Gasgoyne to be unworthy of the talented creature he had married. For, quite suddenly, exasperated beyond endurance, he had cut loose from her domination, going his way with inflexible impassivity, regardless of protests, tears, and hysterical reproaches. He told himself that he had married a “rag and a bone and a hank of hair.” As the years passed, the rag and the bone and the hair—particularly the hair—became more and more conspicuous. Crystal affected marvellous gowns, padded (for she grew very thin), painted her face, and dyed her hair. Gasgoyne made a success with a weekly paper christened *The Beacon*; a witty Frenchman nicknamed him *Le Gardien du Fard*!

Presently, dismissing Crystal from his thoughts, he wrote a letter to Dorothy, telling

her, curtly, what he had done on Min's behalf. Purposely he omitted any tender phrase, knowing that she would miss it, that the omission would trouble her. He signed himself "Yours faithfully," sealed the letter, and sent it by special messenger to Curzon Street. Then he smoked a couple of cigars before he resumed the normal work of his life.

Dorothy acknowledged the letter in terms almost as curt and business-like as his own, which brought a smile to his lips. Emotion is like champagne: uncork it too soon, and the sparkle goes out of it. Nevertheless, he felt the necessity of speech. Accordingly he called upon Moira Curragh.

"You are surprised to see me," he began.

"Not at all. I was expecting you."

"Lady Curragh, you've been an angel to us."

His use of the plural provoked a slight smile. Gasgoyne continued:

"I asked her to go away with me."

"Bah! You say that as if you were a pasha. Did you really think she would go?"

He answered moodily:

"Yes."

She murmured quickly:

"Thank God she didn't."

Something in her tone exasperated him. She conveyed the quality at once the most alluring and the most infuriating to masterful men: an elusiveness which reminded him of Dorothy.

"She has chosen the blameless life," he growled. "She will kiss the boy, play Mendelssohn, darn stockings, and let that Winchester moss grow thick upon her body and soul."

"If you were less violent I should like you better."

"I beg your pardon. Am I violent? I feel so. Yes: volcanic, and she—an iceberg."

"How dare you say that! And you think I shall repeat it to her. But I shall be particularly careful not to mention your name to her. Did you suppose because we let you meet her here that we were tacitly encouraging you? If you did, you are not as clever as I thought. No, no, my friend; we arranged the meeting because we were so sure of her."

"I have been cut out by my own son."

This was his first mention of Min. Lady Curragh eyed him very keenly, but she said lightly:

"I should like to talk to you about Min; he is the most delightful boy I ever saw. Does it aggravate you to hear that?"

"How sharp you are!"

"Ah! it does aggravate you. You are certainly very human, and I can stand in your shoes. This amazing story reveals Doll as a sort of angel, doesn't it? You feel that she can fly, and you can't. And then, as compensation, Fate makes you an unexpected present of a son."

"Whom I am never to recognise. Have you always known that he was mine?"

"Yes."

"You might have given me a hint."

"From first to last I have only considered Dorothy and her wishes. All the same, I protested against her letting you go to Africa. I urged her to spend those first months with me. I objected violently to the adoption of another woman's child."

"And you received my wife. I beg your pardon. You have been a good friend. It goes without saying that Crystal must never know what I know, but I have a presentiment that she'll find out some day."

"She won't, if you leave Dorothy alone."

"Why should I leave her alone?"

"Well, if you want to join her, you must try to rise to her heights; she won't fall to our plane."

"I don't quite take you."

"Oh, yes, you do. If I were not sure that you were the right sort, that in your heart you know gold from dross, I should not have said just now that I was not at home to other visitors." She dropped her light easy manner and spoke gravely, with a feeling of which he had deemed her incapable. "You will not drag her down: that is certain, no matter how hard you try. And I warn you every attempt to do so will set you two farther apart. On the other hand——"

"Go on!"

"If you help her by leaving her alone, by not disturbing the peace which means so much to such a woman, you will, oh be sure of it—have your reward."

"Are you hinting at a life to come?"

"Don't sneer!"

"If you think that renunciation is another word for happiness——"

"I'm not such a fool. It is another word, perhaps, for contentment, serenity. You spoke of yourself just now as an unhappy man. And it is true, in spite of your wonderful success. Dorothy has had no success of that kind, but she is not unhappy. She looks years younger than I do, and we are the same age. Is it necessary to draw the moral?"

"She gave me the same advice that you have just given me."

"Ah!"

"I am to go on working for Self and the Empire."

"You can leave out Self, if you like."

"And have my picture painted with a halo. Was there ever a Saint Richard? I think not. Not in our Calendar. Good-bye, Lady Curragh. Where can I buy a hair shirt?"

She replied gravely enough: "The one you are wearing now will last long enough. Good-bye. Come and see me whenever you can, but keep out of Winchester."

"I haven't been back since I was a school-

boy. One moment. About Min? You've seen him, you say. Can you describe him?"

"I can show you his photograph."

She fetched the picture and placed it in his hand, turning aside, but watching him out of the corner of her eye. He stared intently at the frank, eager face smiling up at his own.

"He's very like you. Another reason for keeping out of Hampshire."

He returned the portrait in silence, and took his leave with an impassive face.

Shortly after this visit, towards the end of the season, Gasgoyne became aware that his wife's health was causing her some concern. This was not surprising, inasmuch as for several years she had persistently practised immoderation in all things. Certainly she had the appearance of a wiry woman, being of the long, lean, indefatigable sort, who go everywhere, do everything, and seem to suffer fatigue only vicariously in the persons of those who witness their amazing activities. Dick was in the habit of saying that the mere recital of what his wife accomplished during an average day gave him the backache.

As usual, he had supposed that she would go to Homburg after Goodwood, but when the time came to order rooms, Crystal said abruptly that she intended to take a three weeks' cure at Bad Nauheim.

"At Nauheim? You don't mean——"

"Yes; heart. Oh, it's nothing serious, and if it were, you wouldn't care."

She looked at him with a curious defiance, as if she had divined that she stood between him and happiness, and meant to take particular pains to go on standing as long as possible.

Dick, hardened though he was, felt a pang of pity.

Then he said quietly: "I suppose Skeffington advises Nauheim?" She nodded carelessly, and hurried away. That afternoon Dick called upon the famous specialist and sent in his card. Not having an appointment, he had to cool his heels in the waiting-room for nearly three quarters of an hour. Finally he stood face to face with the great man.

"My wife tells me you are sending her to Nauheim."

The doctor smiled reassuringly. Then, in his bland tones, he begged Dick to sit down. Mrs. Gasgoyne had a wonderful constitution, of which she had taken perhaps undue advantage. There was cardiac weakness. Nothing organic, but an overstraining. He concluded with emphasis:

"She must take things more quietly."

"And if she won't?"

The doctor looked at his nails.

"If she won't," he murmured, "you must make her, or——" He spread out his hands in an expressive gesture.

"Make her?" Dick repeated the words, frowning.

"Oh, there are ways and means which good husbands know. Quite between ourselves, my dear sir, I can assure you that the hearts of half the fashionable women in England are—er—not what they should be."

"I can believe that," growled Dick.

He took his leave after a few more phrases had been interchanged, and, later, he said to Crystal, as they were driving to a dinner at one of the restaurants:

"Skeffington tells me you must mark time for a bit. I'll help you. Shall we cut our engagements and go abroad?"

"Certainly not," she replied tartly. Then she laughed. "Go abroad with you? Why, we should be bored to death."

"At Nauheim——"

"I don't want you at Nauheim. We may as well understand each other. I've had a fright. You needn't imagine that I shall give you your freedom——"

He felt her glance upon him, and realised miserably that she wished him to protest and his inability to do so.

"Why do you say these things?"

"You never cared for me. But I adored you—once."

"Calm yourself, please."

"What exasperates me is that you never look at our marriage from my point of view."

"I have tried to do so."

"You understand men; how is it you know nothing of women?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Shall I show you my point of view?"

"We'll be in Piccadilly in a minute."

"Lots can be said in a minute. We are never alone now except when we are driving out to dine. I know just what you think of me, my darling Dick; I can see myself, a sort of distorted image, in your eyes. I am a liar," she felt him wince, "and an actress, and false from my hair to the tips of the shoes you think too small for me. I am vain, greedy, and I pay court to people whom you despise."

"This is so unnecessary."

"I am clever as I can stick, you know that. I'm a fine lady now; I go everywhere; I speak English and French rather better than you do; but my cleverness annoys you."

"For Heaven's sake——!"

"I don't believe you ever loved any one except yourself and that woman who jilted you."

"Mrs. Armine was a good friend to you," he answered steadily. Then, deliberately, he added: "I saw her the other day at Lady Curragh's."

"Did you? I thought her smart friends had dropped her. Well, what did she say to you?"

"She gave me to understand," he laughed

derisively, "and very plainly, that she had no wish to renew our acquaintance. She is wrapped up entirely in her son."

"All the same she's a widow; and I believe that if anything happened to me you would make up to her. Because of that I'm going to take extra good care of myself."

Gasgoyne said no more: acutely sensible that his pity for her was genuine.

The possibility of her death, a contingency never calculated, struck him with violence, because it meant the adjustment of three lives. Ever since his last interview with Dorothy he had thought steadily of reunion with her; he had told himself that the psychological moment must come, that sooner or later she would need and claim him. But to leave his wife engrossed in pleasure, able to enjoy life, was one thing; to abandon her when she was weak, to aggravate, possibly, that weakness into an acute disease, would be the act of a heartless brute. Like many very strong men, physical infirmity in women aroused his finest qualities. Now, he told himself grimly, whatever happened he must stick to Crystal.

And she would stick to him like a limpet, outlive him probably, for she had a will of Bessemer steel, and was quite likely to pursue health as doggedly as she had pursued pleasure. Well—there remained ambition and work.

Fate ordained that business of political

importance took him to Winchester during term time. He wrote to Dorothy, warning her that he was coming, expressing a wish that they should meet, if possible, but leaving the matter in her hands. She replied saying that she would stay in her house and run no risks.

At Winchester Dick saw Heseltine, greeted him with geniality, was charmed to find an old friend, and finally considered an invitation to dine and pass the night beneath the old friend's roof.

"Why not?" said Heseltine.

"I will," Dick replied; "provided that we have the evening to ourselves."

"Mother always goes to bed early."

"You live with your mother?"

"Yes."

"Bless me! I supposed Mrs. Heseltine—I heard there was a Mrs. Heseltine—was your wife."

"I am a bachelor," said Heseltine; then he added: "My mother will be so pleased to meet you. We have spoken of you a thousand times: followed your meteoric career."

He laughed pleasantly.

"You might have looked me up, old Sober-sides," said Dick, squeezing his arm.

"*Tu quoque!* Well, we won't reproach each other. It warms the cockles of my heart to see you again."

At dinner, alone with Heseltine and his

mother, Dick became once more the Wykehamist, prattling of adventures in and out of College, using the college slang, the "notions," chaffing Heseltine as if they were boys with gowns tucked up "watching out" for prefects in Meads. Mrs. Heseltine nodded, captivated by Dick's easy manners, but presently she began to talk herself.

"If I had known you were coming, Mr. Gasgoyne, I should have asked Mrs. Armine to meet you."

"Mrs. Armine——?" Gasgoyne sipped his wine to hide a slight confusion.

"Our friend and neighbour: the most charming woman. Only a wall divides her little dining-room from ours."

"You know her, I think?" said Heseltine.

"We have met," said Dick. He wondered what and how much Heseltine knew. Was he a very particular friend?

"Her boy is a pupil of mine," continued Heseltine; "and, you know, it is curious, but he reminds me of you."

"Of me?"

"Of what you were. It rather drew me to him."

At once Mrs. Heseltine plunged into a panegyric of Dorothy, with here and there an insidious question. At each of these her son slightly blushed. His mother's infirmity sometimes tried his patience sorely.

"Mrs. Armine is the most devoted mother,

Mr. Gasgoyne, and as a wife she must have been equally admirable. I suppose you knew Mr. Armine?"

"No," Dick replied. "I never met him."

"Mrs. Armine never mentions him, poor man, but they say in Winchester——"

"Mother, the Winchester gossip won't interest Mr. Gasgoyne."

"But it does," said Dick. "How rude of him to interrupt you, Mrs. Heseltine!"

"Well, well, it is gossip, but the bishop's wife told me that Mr. Armine had never received Christian burial."

"I believe that is true," said Dick gravely.

"In fact, one hardly dares mention it, but I was told by one of the canon's wives, I think, that he was eaten by cannibals."

"No wonder he is never mentioned."

"Just so; I thought you would understand, but the silence has created a little mystery as you may imagine, and that, together with the fact that she seems to have no relations——"

"Mother!"

"Dear David, have we ever seen any of Mrs. Armine's relations?"

"She has relations," said Dick curtly. "I used to know some of them. Stupid people! They rather cut Mrs. Armine because she would not marry the idiotic young lordling they had picked out for her."

"Really! how very interesting. It has made her position here—er—embarrassing. For her

sake, I should like to mention, if I may, that *you* have vouched for——”

Again Heseltine tried to stop the too garrulous tongue.

“Mother, I am sure Mrs. Armine needs no credentials other than her face and the life she has led amongst us.”

“Exactly,” said Dick warmly. “And if she, out of pride, has chosen to keep silence, the least we can do as her friends is to respect that silence.”

Mrs. Heseltine closed her mouth with a sound approximating to a snap. Shortly afterwards, she left the men to their coffee and cigars. Dick stared at the wall which divided him from Dorothy: she had sat in this very room, occupied the chair he was occupying: her presence seemed to suffuse itself like a subtle perfume. Then, through the thin cloud of tobacco-smoke, he saw the mild blue eyes of Heseltine fixed in steady contemplation of his face. Dick turned to his host.

“An excellent cigar, Heseltine.”

Heseltine nodded.

“My mother,” he said abruptly, “is the kindest creature in the world. I should like you to believe that in her way she has silenced rather than provoked any gossip there may have been about Mrs. Armine.”

Dick puffed at his cigar, trying to divine *why* Heseltine had spoken so deliberately.

"I am sure of that," he replied pleasantly. "One could not conceive of your mother being other than a good sort. It has been delightful, this renewal of friendship. After all, the old friends, the old places, the old jokes are what bind us together. You must come to see me, and my wife," he added after a slight pause. "We can always put you up, you know."

"But you will come back here, Gasgoyne?"

"I hope so; but I'm a slave, a regular slave. Positively, I envy you your quiet life. I'm sick of the hurly-burly."

"I fit my little groove; and you fill the big place you have made for yourself. At times we may feel that we should like to stand in each other's shoes, but Nature made our lasts, and Nature knows her business."

As he spoke, he saw that Gasgoyne, who had changed his chair after Mrs. Heseltine left the room, was staring at a framed photograph of Min: the one similar to that in Lady Curragh's possession.

"Mrs. Armine's boy," said Heseltine. "I told you there was a look of you." He rose, took the photograph, and placed it in Dick's hands.

"So there is. But I was a common type."

"You? Not in this country."

Heseltine replaced the photograph. After that the talk flowed pleasantly back into Meads and College Street. The name Armine was not mentioned again.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. GASGOYNE LEAVES TOWN

SHORTLY after his visit to Winchester, Gasgoyne wrote to Dorothy telling her of what had passed at the Heseltines.

"Of course" (he added in conclusion) "you will decide what you think is best, but it seems to me that in withdrawing so completely from your own world you have whetted rather than blunted the tongues of the gossips. At any rate, you admitted to the Heseltines that you knew me, which was wise. Is there any reason now why we should not meet occasionally? Heseltine has begged me to visit him during the next May-fly season. I should like to see something of the boy, who is often in my thoughts. . . ."

To this, after much consideration, Dorothy replied, that, under cover of his friendship for Heseltine, the risk in seeing the boy occasionally might be considered too small to be taken seriously. But, in her heart, Gasgoyne's determination to invade her sanctuary filled her with fears. Her intelligence, the more acute as she grew older, told her that Dick was

behaving selfishly, and yet the admission that he did think of his own son, that he wished to see him, was surely the most natural thing in the world. Lastly, she had faith in his ability and tact: the *flair* of the trained journalist.

To make things easier, Heseltine had been given command of the house where Min boarded. Dick could run down to visit his friend, meet half a dozen boys, give a "feed" and a tip, and depart without arousing the smallest suspicions.

This happened several times during the course of the next twelve months. Dick, as an Old Wykehamist, subscribed munificently to College institutions; Winchester welcomed him with open arms as a distinguished son.

But Dorothy and he met seldom. Upon the first occasion, it became plain to the woman that the man had accepted the situation. Dick spoke curtly of his wife. "She has had a breakdown, you know: heart; but she's keeping herself in cotton-wool for the moment."

"If she should come here——"

"She won't; I'll see to that."

"If she met Min?"

"Nothing would happen."

Then, very nervously and with a hesitation absolutely alien to him, he added: "You know, Doll, personally, I believe in facing things. As Susan says, you have made a hole-and-corner affair of this. If you hadn't, we should be together to-day."

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She did not reply, but her fingers trembled ; at once Gasgoyne was seized with remorse.

"I'm ashamed of myself," he whispered, "forgive me!"

"I like you to speak out what is in your mind."

"The past is past. I am thinking of the future. You are frightened out of your life, I can see, lest Crystal should discover the truth. Now, between ourselves, what do you suppose would happen if she did?"

"If she asked for Min, whatever my legal claim might be, I should give him up."

"She wouldn't ask." He laughed very bitterly. "You dear woman, you ought to meet Crystal; it would relieve your mind. Having once thrown her cap over the windmill, she, so to speak, wears hats with strings and keeps the strings well tied. She has actually persuaded some old tabbies to believe that there were two Crystal Wrides: one an unmentionable young person who danced in pink tights, and the other the Mademoiselle Nitouche of *comédiennes*. I assure you she has made a fetish of respectability."

"And why not, Dick? You are the last man in the world to blame her for doing so."

"I don't blame her. But I want you to understand that she would never acknowledge a son who—well, who was placed in an Institution for Little Mistakes."

"She might tell Min."

"Why?"

Dorothy blushed, too honest not to give her reason.

"If Crystal knew the truth, she would be furious because she would regard Min as a link between you and me. She would discover that I had not married, that—oh! why do you force me to make these humiliating explanations?"

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely. "Crystal says I don't understand women. I don't understand her very well, but you——" He broke off, with a shrug of the shoulders, continuing in a different tone: "I told Crystal that I had met you at the Curraghs."

"Oh, Dick, was that necessary?"

"Yes; I wouldn't run the risk of her hearing it from any one but me. And I told her the truth, too: that you were wrapped up in Min and quite indifferent to one Richard Gasgoyne."

Dorothy smiled faintly.

"And you believe that she believes that? Oh, Dick! What a lot you have to learn yet about—us."

"I'm willing to go to school again with you."

She changed the subject, and soon after they parted, but, next day, happening to meet Heseltine, she noticed that he eyed her keenly, with an odd interrogation in his glance. During these years she had come to regard the quiet silent man as a friend, but now and again he puzzled her. She had fallen into the habit of

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consulting this philosopher, whose quiet monotonous life formed such a contrast to Gasgoyne's varied and variegated career. Time was—in the old Helmingham days—when small beer had been esteemed the flattest beverage, now she had a palate for it. Even uninteresting people interested her, as if the demand for her sympathy had created the supply; her life remained sweet, when it might have turned sour, because its current percolated everywhere, feeding and fed by other streams, ebbing and flowing placidly, but never stagnant.

Shortly after Dick's first visit, Crystal—as Dorothy had foreseen—did travel down to Winchester, and, without warning, called upon Dorothy. Fortunately Min was at school. Susan opened the door, and in the resplendent figure standing upon the threshold failed to recognise the visitor.

"Why, it's Susan Judson," said Crystal.

"Judkins," replied the ancient handmaiden, with a sniff. Crystal's slightly high-pitched tones were unmistakable.

"Is Mrs. Armine at home?"

"I'll go and see," replied the cautious Susan.

In another minute the two women met. Dorothy was wearing one of her oldest and shabbiest dresses; Crystal's frock—later she spoke of it lightly as that—had cost nearly two thousand francs in Paris. Crystal's air, too, her assured bearing, her quite admirable entrance into the pretty little drawing-room,

amazed Dorothy. Instantly she perceived the actress: the counterfeit presentment of the "fine lady": almost but not quite the real thing.

"Dick told me you had returned to England and were living here. I had to come and see you."

They shook hands, and Crystal sat down, taking note of her surroundings with a slightly patronising lift of the eyebrows.

"What a charming room!" she said, with the assumed indifference of the well-bred. Then, abandoning her Carlton House Terrace manner and in the eager impatient voice that recalled irresistibly Vauxhall Bridge Road, she added:

"You know that the child died?"

The suddenness of the question brought a flush to Dorothy's cheeks. She replied evasively:

"So Mr. Gasgoyne told me."

Crystal laughed.

"Do you *think* of him as Mr. Gasgoyne?" Without waiting for an answer she continued: "I never let Dick know that I left the kid in an institution. I couldn't. He's the sort to resent that. I let him believe that the little thing had died soon after it was born. But you know better. And as you were always a good sort—much too good for that matter—I thought I'd run down to warn you to be careful. You might quite unintentionally give me away. It would make mischief between us—make things even worse than they are." Her defiant laugh

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rang out. "And there's Susan. I suppose she's not likely to gabble?"

"Not in the least." Then, with the colour still in her cheeks, for such evasions were odious to her, she said quietly: "I can promise you, Mrs. Gasgoyne, that I shall not make mischief between you and your husband, and I shall certainly tell him nothing that he does not know already."

"Thank you; I'm much obliged." Crystal eyed Dorothy very sharply. "I say, you've not changed much. You don't look the widow or the matron. You've taken good care of yourself. But it must be deadly dull here. And you have a cemetery over the way," she shuddered; "as if graves weren't always near enough."

"If your baby hadn't died," said Dorothy slowly, "would you have taken it back when you married, and acknowledged it?"

"No!" the monosyllable rapped out with startling emphasis. "I'm glad it died. I suppose you know that now I'm an ornament of fashionable society: that's what some of the reporters call me. Oh, I can let myself go with you: it does me good. I've left the stage, but, bless you, I've kept my hand in. And I've done better work on velvet pile carpets than I ever did on the boards. Of course one misses the pit and gallery, but I'm always playing to the stalls."

"And how are you?"

"How am I? Oh, perfectly well, of course. I always say that to other women: it annoys most of 'em; but to you I don't mind admitting that I'm rather seedy. When I'm not made up I look a wreck. I don't complain. Most people would say I've had a good innings. Some of them would stare, though, if they could hear me babbling away like this to you."

The old vitality which had challenged and then enchained Dorothy's interest still flared in her eyes. Dorothy sat beside her, listening to a recital of triumphs on the stage and in society, but sensible that beneath the bubble and froth of words lay deeper currents. She guessed at once that Crystal had taken a rather tiresome journey to accomplish more than the obtaining of a promise that no mention should be made of the Institution for Little Mistakes. Presently, Crystal said lightly:

"Dick told me you had snubbed him. I'm so glad."

Dorothy replied tranquilly: "I am leading, as you see, a very quiet simple life."

"You never really forgave Dick, did you? That's why you married somebody else so soon?"

Crystal was clever, but not quite clever enough to analyse the hesitating utterance of one who is forced, perhaps unwillingly, to smother emotions.

"Need we discuss that?" Dorothy murmured.

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"I'm glad I came," said Crystal, rising. Then, hardly stifling a yawn, she added: "You've turned into a sort of saint, eh? I suppose you potter about this moth-eaten old town, carrying soup to the poor, and all that? Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Dorothy.

"You're a bit frigid. Dick didn't like that, I'll bet." She showed her beautiful teeth. "And I'll just whisper this to you: you had a lucky escape from Dick. Yes, you did. He's absolutely selfish, wrapped up in his own affairs, and finding his pleasures anywhere and everywhere except in his own home. So long!"

With a swish of her silk skirts she was gone.

Let us admit candidly that after this visit Dorothy had a bad time. One hardly likes to set it down, but it is possible that Dick might have found her without resistance had he presented himself in those first abominable moments. She found herself examining her pretty furniture and beloved prints with a vague irritation and dislike, and yet the dominant feeling—or shall we say the one that in the end overpowered all others—was the reflection that Crystal had not seen Min, nor asked a single question concerning him.

Meantime she had told the boy that the money to pay for his education was part of an unexpected legacy, and that she expected

him to exhibit his gratitude by making a special effort. During the first year at Winchester, however, it seemed as if such expectations had fallen upon absolutely barren soil. Min became pre-eminent in games, and a leader amongst the fags. His high spirits, his disregard of authority brought him countless "lines." He tried to work, but public opinion in his house (before Heseltine took command) condemned such endeavour. Dorothy passed sleepless nights, but Heseltine assured her that the boy "would come out all right in the end." The tutor reckoned upon Min's love for Dorothy and his genuine remorse at causing her unhappiness. Meantime, he undertook the breaking of this wild colt, although the young animal had no idea how slowly and carefully the lunging and biting were accomplished. For Heseltine's methods were unostentatious; but his slightly derisive smile became at times a burden upon the mind and memory. Wykehamists admitted the impossibility of humbugging him. At the end of Min's third term, he showed Heseltine, with enormous pride, a silver cup he had won against competitors older and bigger than himself. Heseltine glanced at the cup and then at the triumphant Min, who had been reported as "unsatisfactory, indolent, and grossly careless" by his mathematical master, mathematics—let it be said—being the subject in which the boy had displayed marked ability.

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"Not bad, sir," said the jubilant Min. "My mother will be rather pleased about this."

"Will she?" murmured Heseltine; then smilingly he added thoughtfully: "I'm sure Susan Judkins thinks you a tremendous fellow!"

Min had the grace to blush, and when he showed his trophy to Dorothy he muttered sheepishly: "I wish I had done better in that beastly algebra."

Behind Heseltine's back, very small boys indulged in such withering sarcasm as: "Old Hazel is tied to his mammy's apron-strings," because mother and son were seen walking together in Meads, when other masters were playing racquets or fives, but one afternoon Min heard Heseltine refuse a day's trout fishing on the plea that he had promised to take his mother for a drive. The amazed Min protested:

"I say, sir, there's a splendid lot of fly on the water; you won't have a better chance this year."

To this Heseltine replied drily: "You're devoted to your mother, aren't you, Min?"

"Why, yes, sir, but——"

"And so am I to mine. It's a bond between us. There are lots of trout, but few mothers. Run along!"

Min, however, moved off very slowly, and the next time an allusion was made in his hearing to Heseltine and apron-strings, the

speaker—much to his indignation—had his arm savagely twisted.

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After a couple of years had passed, it became more and more evident that Gasgoyne's affection for his son was fructifying. Min, on his side, had developed hero-worship of the celebrity who treated him with unvarying kindness and a familiarity untainted by patronage. Dick, warned by Dorothy, was friendly with other Wykehamists, but Min knew that he was a favourite.

One day he said to his friend Parflete, red-haired and eccentric as ever :

"Mr. Gasgoyne has tipped me a fiver."

"I'm hanged if I can understand why he's taken such a fancy to you."

"It is rather odd."

Parflete considered for a moment, then he said with a significant wink of his sound eye :
"A fellow gave me a watch once. It didn't go, because I took it to pieces the first day I had it. That fellow had only seen me twice, but I found out afterwards he'd been spoons on my mater. Twig?"

A vision of a stout lady with black hair, worn in Madonna bands, tightly drawn back from a face whose tint indicated dyspepsia rather than rude health, confronted Dick.

"Spoons on your mater?" he repeated.

Parflete caught an inflection of incredulity.

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"My mater was jolly good-looking—once," he said angrily.

"Of course," Min eagerly assented. "And, by Jove! you're right, Billy. I'll bet my boots that Mr. Gasgoyne was spoons on my mater."

Saturated with this illuminating discovery, he rushed to Dorothy.

"I know why Mr. Gasgoyne is so jolly decent to me," he told her. "I've found you out; oh you sly, little Mummie!"

Then, delighted with her ready blush, he kissed her and whispered:

"Mr. Gasgoyne was spoons on you once, now, wasn't he?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, gravely.

"And yet he married a holy terror."

At his tone she took alarm.

"What do you mean? Have you seen Mrs. Gasgoyne? She was a beauty, a famous actress."

"She paints her face," said Min disdainfully. "One of the men in my house knows her quite well. Whatever she may have been, she's now a caution to snakes."

"Don't let me ever hear you speak of any woman in that way," Dorothy commanded; and Min was so astonished that his voluble tongue seemed to be paralysed. He had hoped that Dorothy would let him have a glimpse, at least, of some lavender-scented romantic page. As usual, she had shied away from the past with unaccountable violence.

And for the thousandth time her silence intimidated him (about the only thing that did). Very dimly he began to perceive suffering and disappointment beneath a smooth skin and behind clear eyes. Min was now seventeen and approaching manhood rapidly.

During that summer term an incident occurred. The young man discovered what the boy had been too blind to see, to wit that Dorothy had made concrete sacrifices for his sake. One day he remembered with vividness a cross of handsome diamonds which she had inherited from her mother.

"You never wear your cross," he said.

"Don't I?" Dorothy smiled. "Well, Min, you are old enough to know that I sold it."

"Sold it! Why?"

She hesitated for a moment; then, with a slight flush, she said quietly: "To pay my debt to Mr. Williamson."

The colour died out of her cheeks and flamed in the young man's.

"Did you sell the 'Cries' to pay my school bills?"

The "London Cries," a fine set of thirteen prints, used to hang in the drawing-room. When they disappeared other and less valuable prints took their place, and Min was made to understand that Dorothy had been playing "swops."

"Yes: they had to go too."

"Oh, mother!"

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He kissed her and murmured a few tender words, but doing so remembered what Hesel-tine had said about kisses and words being cheap.

A fortnight afterwards Dick Gasgoyne came to Winchester to see the Eton match, held that year at Winchester. Min took part in this tremendous contest in which, for the first time in many seasons, Winchester won a glorious victory. He played a very useful innings, and was almost embraced by Hesel-tine, who quite abandoned his usual chill composure. Then Gasgoyne, taking Min aside, told him he was going to present him with a gun.

"Oh, sir, how awfully generous of you!"

ughed, delighted with the young
ager, grateful face.

I shall give you some shooting.
"What's up?"

Dick eye had detected a passing cloud,
by a vivid flush.

Gasgoyne, I suppose you'd think me a
"asked you for—for the money

money? You're not in debt, are you?

horribly."

"Young rascal! To whom?"

"Mother."

He cleared, but his thick dark brows

expressed interrogation.

Hurriedly, yet haltingly, Min explained:

*Christmas Market
Have -
with love & best
wishes. H. & J.*

reciting the facts about the sale of the diamond cross and the "Cries." Gasgoyne nodded. Then he laid his hand upon Min's shoulder.

"If I send you a cheque, what will you do?"

"Spend it on diamonds."

"Um! I think we'd better buy those diamonds together, and do a play at the same time. What do you say?"

This programme was carried out at the beginning of the summer holidays, Crystal being absent at the time. Min came back to Winchester with a fine diamond ring in his pocket. He said with a gay laugh: "You see, Mumsie, my old gun will do jolly well for the next five years. Let me slip on the ring and wish you everything good under heaven."

She kissed him, murmuring: "My dear son, my dear, dear son."

As he grew older, he discussed with her subjects which revealed his maturing ideas and judgments. Since the famous affair with Nellie, he had adored half a score of charmers. Dorothy was always the sympathetic confidante of these amorous adventures. But one day, to her extreme dismay, he began to talk of illicit love and its consequences. Long before, when he was a small boy, he had asked, *à propos* of some passage in English history: "Mumsie, what is a natural son?" To this Dorothy replied categorically: "A natural son, Min, is a child whose father and mother have never been properly married." Min, at that time absolutely innocent,

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digested this information for at least a minute before he said, with a quip which indicated humour: "Why aren't they called unnatural sons?"

But a child of ten can be pushed gently from thin ice, or be forbidden to approach it. With a young man of seventeen, questions must be met squarely.

Upon this particular occasion, they had ascended the hill crowned with trees which rises to the south-west of Winchester. Below lay the ancient town, slightly obscured by haze and mist, out of which crept the Itchen, that silvery stream beloved by anglers. Upon the other side of the city, silhouetted against the evening sky, black and sinister, the tower of the county gaol frowned grimly upon the soft red-brick houses at its base. That morning at eight o'clock a woman had been hanged for the murder of her baby. The case, a *cause célèbre*, engrossed the sympathy and pity of all England. Desperate efforts had been made to obtain a reprieve, but the Home Secretary, fortified by the support of the judge who tried the wretched woman, remained inexorable. Dorothy saw Min's eyes resting upon the tower, and guessed his thoughts.

"What beasts there are in the world!"

"Don't think of her as a beast," she whispered.

"*Her*? I was thinking of the man who betrayed her, of the man who escapes scot free! I'd like to kill him—with my own hand."

As before, she was vouchsafed a glimpse of Crystal. These gusts of passion were rare with Min, and therefore the more impressive.

"If anybody belonging to me were treated like that——"

"My dear Min, you mustn't get so excited."

"I can't help it, mother. Why, you look quite scared. It's the injustice of it that maddens me. Is there one law for women and another law for men?"

"Yes," said Dorothy slowly. "Eastern women understand that better than we do. The purity of the race lies in the hands of the women, and a violation of that purity is a greater offence in a woman than in a man."

She spoke dreamily, giving utterance to an opinion often carefully considered, not remembering for the moment the particular instance of Min's birth.

"It would be easier for you to forgive the man in such a case as that," he indicated the gaol, "rather than the woman?"

"Yes."

"I am surprised."

A new note in his voice challenged her attention. Perhaps, for the first time, she regarded him as a man, and as such one who was entitled to an opinion which he would not lightly relinquish. Then, in full flood, the significance of the subject in the mouth of Crystal's child almost swept her away.

"He went away and left her," continued Min,

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scarlet with indignation, "and he was not an ignorant man. Some people would call him a gentleman. A gentleman!"

"If he didn't—know——"

"That aggravates it. He ought to have known. And you, of all the women in the world, you defend him."

"Min, you are too young and too inexperienced to throw stones; and what makes it worse in your case is that you are such a good shot."

She touched his arm, smiling pathetically, but he still regarded her frowningly: wondering why even the best of women was so hard upon her own sex.

"It's lucky the baby is dead," he muttered. "That was the kindest thing the mother could do to it, to murder it!"

"Don't say that!"

He gazed at her in astonishment; her eyes were wet, her finely formed fingers trembled. In a vague fashion he apprehended trouble, some dark shadow behind this gracious tender figure. Regarding her he began to stammer: "Why, mother, what is it? Surely you agree with me. In our civilisation what place is there for a basely born child, the son of a gentleman and some wretched waif?"

She answered him slowly, weighing each word, trying to speak impersonally, to throw the fine dust of generalities into the artless eyes looking into hers.

"There is a place here for such, my son : a place that can be filled worthily, in spite of disabilities. And Nature is sometimes kinder to these poor love-children : often they are stronger, healthier, more beautiful than the others. I have heard my father say so."

Of late years, she had spoken several times of her father to the boy, describing his life and his indefatigable labours on behalf of the poor and infirm ; but she had kept secret his name or rather, she had cut off the Fairfax, leaving the Middleton, his second name, which he had never used.

"All the same," replied Min, after a pause, "if it were me, I'd sooner be dead."

He rose abruptly, and moved a few paces away, turning his back upon the woman, who gazed after him with troubled, mournful eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

COUSIN AMY

DURING ten years Dorothy had built up a substantial position in a censorious and gossip-mongering community. She would have been the first to admit that the task was entertaining. Her mind, ever alert, found distraction in the exercise of tact and discreet silences. More than once she had trembled upon the ragged edge of discovery, had gazed quaking into that abysmal void into which are flung the socially unfit; but she had escaped recognition as Dorothy Fairfax so long that perhaps she was not unreasonable in considering herself immune.

The always impending sword fell suddenly.

She was drinking tea at the Deanery, in the pretty room which looks out into the Close. The dean's wife, Mrs. Chatfield, reckoned herself to be Mrs. Armine's friend; but the fact that Dorothy withheld confidence respecting her past had rankled in the august lady's bosom. Nevertheless, capacity for such work as Charity Organisation, for playing the piano at Church concerts, for plying her needle with Friendly

Girls, and like accomplishments, had captured respect and affection.

Dorothy was alone with her hostess when the door opened, and the butler, in that voice of sonorous dignity which lends itself so admirably to the presentation of the illustrious, said loudly: "The Countess of Ipswich."

Afterwards, Dorothy wondered whether she would have recognised her cousin Amy, once so slender, so becomingly (her mother's adjective) modest, so characteristically the young English "Mees," in the majestic figure which swept into the Deanery drawing-room. During the moment when Mrs. Chatfield was greeting her visitor, Dorothy realised the impossibility of escape, and summoned all energies to confront her cousin. Two possibilities presented themselves. Amy, pulpy-witted Amy, might have forgotten her, or, remembering, might possess wit and tact enough to dissemble. Then Mrs. Chatfield said: "So kind of you to look me up: I heard you were stopping with the dear Andovers. May I introduce a friend of mine, Mrs. Armine? Mrs. Armine—Lady Ipswich."

"Gracious! It's Dollie."

"How do you do, Amy?" said Dorothy.

The cousins shook hands; Amy very flushed of countenance, Dorothy, pale but calm: a slight smile upon her lips. Mrs. Chatfield stared from one to the other. Her first emotion was one of gratified vanity, because she had

supported a stranger who apparently was on intimate terms with a great lady. Then she saw the great lady's purple cheeks, and suspended judgment. Amy, it has been said, had divided most of the past fifteen years between the nursery and the kennels. She adored her children and her terriers, which proves she had affections. Moreover, at one time she had loved and admired Dorothy as a sister. Now, looking into Dorothy's face, slightly faded, but with that unmistakable expression of spirituality and delicacy which made her a more beautiful woman at eight-and-thirty than she had ever been in her teens, Amy told herself that here was a noble opportunity to befriend the outcast and fallen, now living, apparently, in the odour of sanctity. Behind this lay, of course, the amorphous instinct to—as her mother had once put it—hush things up. Acting upon these reflections, she bent forward and kissed her cousin's cheek. Into Dorothy's eyes crept a tiny smile of amusement. She understood her Amy.

"We have not met for an age," said Amy. "Are you living here, dear?"

"Alone with my son; yes."

"Of course—your son. Shall you be at home to-morrow?"

"Yes," Dorothy replied, after an instant's hesitation. Then she mentioned her address, which Amy repeated. Mrs. Chatfield's slightly congested eyes cleared perceptibly as she heard

Dorothy's inquiries concerning the Helminghams and Amy's replies.

"Poor Papa! He is a confirmed invalid. And Mamma—as devoted as ever! Such an example! We lead very humdrum lives. Teddy, as you know, hates town."

Mrs. Chatfield smiled for the first time. It was comforting to reflect that Mrs. Armine knew Teddy. Dorothy took her leave, wondering what Amy would say as soon as she was out of hearing.

Next day, Amy herself furnished this information.

"My dear, I had to answer questions. Oh! I was discreet, you may be sure. And in these cases the truth is not best, is it?"

"The truth?"

"I admitted frankly that we had not met because of your—er—marriage with—ahem!—Mr. Armine."

"Oh!"

"And I laid a little stress upon your independent ways as a girl, and your upbringing——"

"You mentioned my father's name?"

"Of course not. Mrs. Chatfield would have hunted it up in the 'Peerage.'"

"You have tried to make things easy. I'm much obliged. Do tell me about yourself and your children."

Upon these congenial topics Amy spoke volubly for nearly an hour. Her eldest son

was at Eton, and going into the Guards; he was the *dearest* fellow, and her girls were *very* satisfactory—not *too* clever, but *so* amiable and domestic in their tastes. Alicia, the younger, drew quite too delightfully in water-colours. . . .

Dorothy listened to this artless prattle with an uncomfortable sense of envy and jealousy, not because the speaker was a countess and a rich woman, but for the subtler reason that every word which fell from her lips indicated the possession of a position in her county and family which nothing could assail.

For Dorothy never doubted that recognition meant renewal of gossip and a notoriety which might end in catastrophe; it meant also questions upon the part of Min to be answered evasively or with humiliating fibs. Finally Amy rose, serene and majestic. As she kissed Dorothy, she murmured confidentially: "By-gones are by-gones, my dear. Shall I ask Flora Andover to call?"

"No, thank you."

"She had heard of you. She told me that Mr.—er—Armine had been eaten by cannibals, and that was why his name was never mentioned. Dorothy, you have managed so cleverly, and you look—How you have kept your complexion is quite amazing! And—your figure! And everybody here seems to speak of you in the highest terms. Poor Mamma will be so pleased, and so would Papa if he could be

made to understand. Yes; the mind, unhappily, has quite failed. He spends the morning in packing up papers and books, and in the afternoon he unpacks them. In the evening Mamma sets him simple little sums in addition and subtraction!"

"Oh! how dreadful!" Dorothy exhibited real sympathy, slightly wasted upon a lady too serenely engrossed in her own life to enter very deeply into the lives of others less fortunate.

"It might be worse, Dorothy. Teddy has an uncle who held Orders. He has a mania for taking off his clothes in public places. Very shocking! Good-bye, dear, so glad to have seen you."

She drove off in the resplendent Andover barouche, waving her plump hand and smiling.

A week later, Dorothy was present at a small garden-party, and it happened that the dean's wife seemed to melt out of any group when Dorothy approached it. Mrs. Chatfield, indeed, was on a hot scent, although for the moment running mute. How she would give tongue presently! For she had found in her Peerage a significant entry under the name Helmingham: the date of the marriage between George Fairfax and the sister of Sir Augustus, and the result—one daughter, Dorothy. Instantly she leaped to the conclusion

that Mrs. Armine and Lady Ipswich were first cousins. Old friends who have not met for years do not kiss, and the great lady's kiss had been, as Mrs. Chatfield remembered, rather a kiss of relationship than of friendship. This frigid salute was confirmation strong, but she was practical enough to know that what satisfied her might not satisfy other inquiring minds in Winchester. And to identify Dorothy Fairfax with Dorothy Armine might be no easy matter.

At the time of the garden party she had already discovered a part of the truth. A friend in town, with an encyclopædic memory and a slight acquaintance with the house of Helmingham, had answered one question upon four pages of notepaper. Dorothy Fairfax had been presented at Court by Lady Helmingham, had been taken about Mayfair by that lady, had become engaged to be married to Richard Gasgoyne, then an obscure journalist, had been (supposedly) jilted by him, and finally had mysteriously disappeared. Mrs. Chatfield's face grew grim as she perused this letter, for although she could reasonably claim to be a loyal wife, a loving mother, and an exemplary Churchwoman, she held—despite (perhaps because of) these qualifications—the obtaining of her friendship and support under false pretences to be an unpardonable sin.

Nevertheless, nothing might have happened had it not been for the excellent Mrs. Heseltine,

who would cheerfully have sacrificed the tip of her too active tongue rather than wittingly do Dorothy an injury. Unhappily, Mrs. Heseltine had been uplifted by her son's renewal of friendship with a personage. Dick, you may be sure, had paid David's mother a score of attentions—salmon, grouse, venison, came from Scotland—and Mrs. Heseltine could not deny herself the pleasure of saying to any guest who might be dining with them: "Mr. Gasgoyne sent this fine fish. He never forgets old friends, however humble they may be."

Mrs. Chatfield, to whom words to this effect were addressed, answered thoughtfully: "I've never met Mr. Gasgoyne. Does he come often to Winchester?"

"He is a Wykehamist," Mrs. Heseltine replied, "and interested in all that concerns us; his kindness to our boys is extraordinary. He has actually asked young Armine to stalk this year in Sutherland."

"Indeed! how very kind, as you say!"

Mrs. Chatfield's grandfather had kept a pack of harriers, so the love of the chase was inherent in her. Positively, a view halloa nearly left her lips. A hare, indeed, was in sight.

Obviously, Richard Gasgoyne wished to show kindness to the son of a woman he had treated unkindly. Nothing more natural, but the mystery remained—the ever-recurrent question: "Who was Armine?" Debrett never mentioned Armine.

When the ladies left the dining-room, Mrs. Chatfield repulsed the advance of a prolific wife of a minor canon and turned with undue impatience to her hostess, with whom she withdrew to a corner of the drawing-room.

"We were speaking of Mrs. Armine's boy," she began easily. "He is a young man now——"

"And leaving at the end of this term," said Mrs. Heseltine.

"Going to Oxford, I have heard."

"Yes, New College."

"His mother, considering her circumstances, is very generous."

"The boy has, I am told, means of his own. What a charming woman Mrs. Armine is!"

"Remarkably so; but, if I may be allowed the expression, veiled. One has never seen her *quite* clearly. I don't even know her maiden name."

"Middleton. Her father was a doctor."

"Ah!"

Again Mrs. Chatfield looked grim. She could see the entry in Debrett: "Florence Mary, married, 1856, George Middleton Fairfax, F.R.C.S."

Mrs. Heseltine, sensible of a fall in the temperature, added warmly: "And the most devoted mother I ever saw."

"Is she going to Scotland too?"

"Oh, no. She hardly ever leaves home. I understand there will be no ladies at the lodge."

Unfortunately, Mr. Gasgoyne has no son of his own. My David tells me that young Armine is just such a boy as Mr. Gasgoyne used to be: really quite a remarkable resemblance, both mentally and physically. Like is generally drawn to like."

"I see," said Mrs. Chatfield, drawing in her breath rather sharply.

Mrs. Heseltine, looking up, perceived that her guest's face was slightly pinker than usual, and that her eyes were sparkling. A successful hunt is admittedly rejuvenating.

The invitation to stalk in Scotland had been accepted by Min, not without much discussion between Dorothy and Dick. But, as usual, the stronger had overpowered the remonstrance and protest of the weaker. Also, the boy himself was so keen. Dorothy had not the heart to keep him in Winchester, playing tennis, when royal sport awaited him in the Highlands. Upon a higher plane entirely was another reason for risking the remote possibility of discovery. The time had come for Min to choose a profession, and to Dorothy's dismay indications were not lacking that pipe-clay was in his marrow. Gasgoyne, however, pointed out that advancement was slow in the Army, and that a keen soldier saw very little of his mother.

"You are an only son," he said to Min. "A bullet will kill her if it hits you."

The young man nodded.

"All the same, I should make a fair fighting man."

"There are always fights," said Gasgoyne.

"I'm not fit to be parson, doctor, or barrister."

"How about—journalism?"

"I think I should like that."

Accordingly, Dick enjoyed the pleasure of telling Dorothy that he had successfully lured Min in the direction of Fleet Street. He insisted, however, upon the visit to Scotland.

"It's a ticklish thing steering the young idea," he said, "unless you know what you are at. I don't pretend to know Min, and I want to make his intimate acquaintance. Lend him to me for three weeks or a month."

"But Crystal? Oh, Dick, you are getting reckless. We see too much of each other."

Gasgoyne regarded her intently.

"We have met exactly five times during the past four years. Do you think I have not counted them? Do you grudge me—minutes, when you know that a minute with you is more to me than a year with any one else?"

She blushed faintly, unable to meet his glance: always afraid that the flames, so long suppressed, would burst out and destroy both of them.

"As for Crystal," he continued in a different voice, "she is wrapped up in herself and her health."

"She is better?"

"Better? I don't know. Sometimes— He broke off abruptly, adding with grim relevance: "She'll outlive us. And she has been to the lodge for years. But there is no adequate reason why they shouldn't meet."

"She is his mother. And, Dick, you are fonder of Min than you think."

"Bah! He is all yours. Are you going to lend him to me or not?"

She told herself that she must give way, and did so.

The meeting with Amy Ipswich followed, and then a period of comparative tranquillity. Later, the dean and Mrs. Chatfield went abroad for a six weeks' holiday. They returned in the middle of September (about the time when Min travelled to Sutherland), and everybody in and about the Close was invited to a garden party at the Deanery.

"Of course you are going," said Mrs. Hestine to Dorothy.

Dorothy hesitated a moment; then, very quietly, she replied: "No, I am not. The truth is, I have been forgotten."

"Forgotten? You?"

"At any rate, I have not received a card."

"Shall I speak to Mrs. Chatfield?"

"Pray don't!"

"It is very strange. Mrs. Chatfield is very particular about such matters, almost too particular; don't you think so?"

"Perhaps." Dorothy smiled faintly; she was quite sure that the dean's wife had purposely withheld the invitation. From a certain expression in the sharp beady eyes of her visitor she divined that Mrs. Heseltine was as certain as she. David's mother rose to take leave.

"It's very oppressive, is it not? Thunder in the air."

"Yes." Dorothy held out her hand.

"My dear," Dorothy felt the thin, wiry fingers clasp her own tightly, "I suppose you know that nothing would ever shake my friendship and affection for you—nothing. I'm a babbling old woman, but if—well, I'll say this and no more, speaking for my son as much as for myself: your little finger is more to us than the dean's wife, and the dean himself, and all the Chapter. There!"

She whisked off, leaving Dorothy touched but dismayed. No preternatural acuteness was necessary to infer that Mrs. Heseltine had called with a definite purpose; to warn, and, with any encouragement, to advise.

"There is certainly thunder in the air," said Dorothy.

CHAPTER XVII

BEN ABER

GASGOYNE's moor and forest were situated not far from Lairg; and on the westerly margin flowed the river Shin, which, in its upper pools, may or may not hold many salmon. Splendid as the place was reckoned to be from a sporting point of view, it possessed but a small lodge. Partly on this account, and more particularly because the wife's friends were not the husband's, Crystal never went to Ben Aber. Gasgoyne had promised Min a few days' grouse-shooting and a salmon or two, but the "tall red deer" were to furnish the principal entertainment. Min, as has been said, accepted the invitation gladly, but neither Dorothy nor he had any conception of what such a privilege was worth in the eyes of persons living north of Tweed. It is certain also that Dick, in spite of his experience, had overlooked the importance of the favour he was showing to a young man who had never stalked in his life.

Crystal heard of the matter from the slightly injured individual who for several years had shared the stags with Dick.

"You're stalking with Dick?" she had said, meeting him at Sandown.

"No, I'm not," he replied ruefully. "Dick has left me out this year, worse luck. He tells me he means to have up a youngster."

"This is the first I've heard of it," said Crystal.

However, when she spoke of the change to her husband, he replied carelessly that there was nothing more delightful than to see a really keen boy entered to royal game.

"Who is this boy you've asked?"

"Young Armine."

"Oh! Young Armine, eh? Do you do this extraordinary thing for his sake or his mother's."

"For his," said Dick indifferently. "I never see the mother. The boy is a nice boy, Crystal." He paused, and continued with a feeling in his voice which surprised her: "I wish we had had a son like young Armine."

Crystal laughed derisively and changed the subject. He wondered whether he had spoken deliberately or on impulse. He was so certain that the truth would leak out that he felt justified in preparing Crystal to receive it. He fortified himself with the reflection that if Crystal met Min and liked him, the shock would be less to both.

Crystal, for the moment, thought no more of the matter. Long ago it had been understood that so long as Dick gave to her a free hand in London, she would not interfere with Ben Aber.

But it struck her as odd that Dick should contemplate a month's *tête-à-tête* with a boy.

At the end of this season, Sir Bodley Skeffington sent her again to Nauheim. The first "cure" had done her so much good that Skeffington, on her return, pronounced her infinitely better—a fact she carefully concealed from Dick, because she divined his sympathy for her although she repudiated it, and was comfortably alive to the convenience of possessing an ailment to plead as an excuse for leaving undone certain things which ought to be done. Excellent persons, with inferior cooks, were accustomed to hear of Mrs. "Dick" Gasgoyne's sincerest regret that her "heart" kept her such a prisoner in her own house. As a matter of fact, she had resumed even with greater ardour the old life of racing, dancing, and card-playing. Dick paid all bills, and told himself that Skeffington was a bit of a humbug.

However, the second visit to Nauheim gave her a bad fright; for the Nauheim doctor declared that the lesion had become serious. At the conclusion of her "cure," he said that she must return at the end of two months, and, meanwhile, would do well to live quietly in some unfashionable and bracing spot.

"If I come here next year——"

The German, who had no time to waste, glared at her through his spectacles.

"Do as I tell you," he growled, "or—well, how shall I my meaning make clear? Soh!

If you think my advice not worth taking, I shall have the honour of wishing you 'adieu,' madame, instead of 'Auf wiedersehn'!"

"I'll do anything," Crystal replied, thinking of Ben Aber—certainly the quietest and most bracing spot in the world.

Having for many years obeyed no law higher than the impulse of the moment, she started at once for Scotland—arriving, indeed, two days after Min, and on the heels of a telegram. Gasgoyne was much put out, knowing that Dorothy would be alarmed. But he could not dismiss Min without exciting Crystal's suspicions; so he wrote to Dorothy, telling her what had happened and entreating her not to worry. He concluded with these words: "She has taken a great fancy to the boy. As he is going into my business, they must have met sooner or later, why not now?"

Dorothy laid down the letter feeling that the end was in sight. Instinct told her that a mother must recognise her own son, that something impossible to anticipate or guard against would reveal one to the other.

Within a week Min wrote:

"I'm having a ripping time. Mr. Gasgoyne has lent me a rifle and given me a split-cane salmon rod. Mrs. Gasgoyne turned up unexpectedly from Nauheim, and has been very decent to me; but I don't like her, and I can't make out why Mr. Gasgoyne married her. It seems horrid to write such things under her

own roof, but you told me to be sure to tell you everything, so here goes. She has been ill, but she doesn't look it, because she's so wonderfully made up. Of course she must have been a stunner once, but now I think she looks awful. Mummie, I should die of shame if she were my mother. When I compare her with you, I tell myself I'm the luckiest beggar. I never meet her till dinner-time because I'm out on the hill all day long. She talks to me a lot, but it's something awful the way she rags Mr. Gasgoyne—and before the servants, too! He never says a word—he's a ripper!—but if she makes it too hot, he talks to his dog. If I married a woman like that I should always have a dog handy. I feel rather a beast, but I am most awfully sorry for Mr. Gasgoyne. . . .”

Dorothy destroyed this ingenuous epistle. But one line of it haunted her night and day: “I should die of shame if she were my mother. Of course boys exaggerated everything. My mother would not die; but, from her knowledge of his character, it was certain that the truth might discolour his life, and by changing his point of view change him, perhaps unrecognisably. However, she could do nothing but pray; and she prayed with amazing fervour, tempered always by the conviction that a crisis was at hand.

Meantime, at Ben Aber, the days were

passing swiftly. Crystal asked Min a few discreet questions concerning his life at Winchester. According to the young fellow, there had been no renewal of intercourse between Dorothy and Dick. If they met it was in secret, probably not in Winchester. Believing Dorothy to be a saint, Crystal came to the conclusion that Dick had told the exact truth when he assured her that Dorothy refused a renewal of acquaintance. Obviously, also, Dick had asked the boy to Ben Aber because he was a nice boy, and able to inspire an interest greater than the merely sentimental one that he happened to be the son of the woman Dick had once wished to marry. She quite approved Dick's wish that he should be given a billet in Fleet Street. Something was owing to Dorothy, and the account could be settled vicariously by befriending Min.

It is often amusing, and always instructive, to trace great events to their tiny sources. Humanly speaking, Crystal might have lived and died in ignorance of Min's relation to Dick had it not been for the appearance of a garrulous neighbour at Ben Aber. The stranger was the wife of a rich Glasgow manufacturer who had leased the adjoining forest. Born and brought up in Paisley, this lady knew nothing of the Gasgoynes, and had never met either of them before. She drove over one Sunday to ask some question concerning the march, whose exact position it was proposed

to define by erecting a few small cairns. Dick settled the business in a few minutes. The Min came in. Before Crystal could present him, the stranger said volubly:

"You needn't tell me who this is. You laddie, of course: and the very living breathing image of Mr. Gasgoyne."

"I beg your pardon," said Crystal coldly. "This is Mr. Armine, a friend, and no relation either to Mr. Gasgoyne or myself."

A London woman would have laughed and apologised; but north of Tweed discussion and self-justification are regarded as pastimes. The good Paisley lady insisted upon the likeness, pointed out half a dozen points of resemblance, and triumphantly demonstrated her powers of observation. Then Min said with a flush:

"I'm jolly glad I *am* like you, sir."

Dick nodded with an impassive face. He had reckoned upon the possibility of Crystal detecting the likeness, a possibility discounted by his knowledge of her limitations. In common with most self-absorbed, clever persons, his powers of observation were habitually focussed upon herself. As a matter of fact, she had not perceived the resemblance till it was pointed out.

Then it took hold of her, obsessed her, tormented her in twain. She went to her own room, after the departure of the garrulous guest, pleading fatigue, but dissembling her real feelings with

such art that Dick, although alert, detected no signs of stress. Perhaps Crystal was most clever in what she called "finding people out," because, being guileful herself, she suspected and was swift to detect guile in others. Her experience as a fine lady, as an "ornament of society," had not diminished such perceptions. She had seen and heard some very remarkable things during the period of translation from Vauxhall Bridge Road to Carlton House Terrace. But always she had believed Dorothy to be—as she put it—too good for Dick, or any other man. And always, let it be remembered, she had confessed herself unable to understand Dorothy's unselfishness in postponing her engagement. Incapable of such an act of self-sacrifice, she had exalted Dorothy high above others of her sex. From the very first meeting she had surrendered to a power which transcended her intelligence. Crystal never attempted to impute to Dorothy any motive save the obvious one. It is true that she underrated Dorothy's capacity for passionate love. When Dick told her that Dorothy must have married Armine soon after his departure for Africa, she had said curtly: "She never cared for you as I did, Dick—she couldn't;" but this conviction increased rather than diminished her faith in the other's goodness.

Now, a monstrous motive darkened her horizon. What if the engagement between Dick and Dorothy had been broken off *before* her

visit to Oakley Street? Dick, always intensely ambitious, might very well have postponed marriage till after his return from Africa.

At once, Dorothy's subsequent conduct, her sympathy for a fellow-sufferer, her mysterious disappearance, her apocryphal marriage with a man whom nobody had ever known or heard of, her separation from her own people, her absurd suppression of her maiden name—kept secret even from her own son—these things indicated mischief. Why did this young Armine adore his mother and never mention his father?

Fact after fact lent colour—a flaming scarlet—to her conviction that Dorothy had been left in exactly the same unhappy plight as herself. Doubtless Dorothy had hoped that Dick would return and marry her, and doubtless, also, Dick would have done so had not Dorothy overreached herself by hiding in Touraine under the name of Armine. Dick, of course, had found her masquerading as wife or widow and had bolted. Then he had married, partly out of pique, partly because a "star" had dazzled him, partly as an act of reparation. Too late, he had met Dorothy and learned the truth. Ever since, the pair had carried on a shameful and detestable intrigue. She writhed thinking how cleverly they had played their little comedy, how easily they had befooled her. At this moment, doubtless, they were laughing in their sleeves, immeasurably amused at her

blindness and fatuity. She could see Dorothy attending service in the cathedral with her tongue in her cheek.

After a wretched, sleepless night, she came to a determination. Realising that she must obtain more evidence before she exposed her husband, she made up her mind to leave the lodge at once. Dick would be relieved rather than surprised. And he was accustomed to her flittings. She lay in bed till the hour was past when the men started on their respective beats. Then she told her maid to pack up, and wrote the following note :

"I am sick of Ben Aber, and must see my doctor. Will wire future movements from town. Say good-bye to young Armine for me."

Having written this, she became conscious of a strange physical exhilaration. Lassitude and misery gave place to a vital and vivifying excitement. She told herself that she was quite strong enough to carry on a campaign against shamelessness and lies, able to expose her enemies, to destroy them and their works.

She came downstairs in her travelling dress about half-past ten. A "machine" was waiting to take her and her maid to Lairg. She sat down for a moment upon a bench outside the lodge, a place commanding a delightful view of the Shin and the moors stretching far as the eye could see in a southerly direction. To the north rose the splendid peak of Ben Klibreck ; to the west were Ben Hope, Ben Hee, and

Ben Loyal. The day was a fine one in late September, cloudless, but with enough breeze to make stalking practicable, and with that crisp feeling in the air indicating frost and the absence of midges.

"Hullo, Mrs. Gasgoyne!" said a youthful voice.

She looked up to see Min. He explained quickly that something had gone amiss with his rifle; he had returned for another, and learned from a servant that she was leaving. As he spoke she noted that the little finger of his left hand stood out—a trick common to Dick. His eyes sparkled behind their dark lashes, just as Dick's had sparkled when he was young, and broke, and green!

"Are you feeling worse to-day?" the young fellow asked.

"Yes," said Crystal.

"I shall see you off," he declared.

But she refused this peremptorily, staring at him so hard that he blushed, and begged to know if anything was wrong.

"I hope my face is clean." He rubbed it, trying to interpret the expression in her eyes. She had just decided that his hair waved back from the temples as Dick's used to grow before time and worry thinned it.

"Quite clean. You're a nice boy, a very nice boy. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

Had she asked his exact age the truth would

have been revealed. At that moment she was thinking of the child left in the Institution for Little Mistakes. He also would have been eighteen. This youth, doubtless, was a few months younger.

"Good-bye," she said abruptly, rising and holding out her hand.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Gasgoyne. I wish you'd change your mind about my putting you into the train and making you cosy."

"Cosy!" She smiled derisively. "I can make myself cosy."

"You and Mr. Gasgoyne have been most awfully good to me. A chap I know said he'd never heard of such luck. Lots of fathers, he said, grudged stags to their own sons."

The maid appeared with a travelling rug and small bag. Crystal got into the "machine," which rattled off. As she looked back, she saw Min standing bare-headed, smiling, and waving his cap.

"I was blind not to have seen it at once," she reflected.

Travelling south, she grew calmer—the presence of a lynx-eyed maid exacted calmness—and presently a smile twisted her lips, for she was reflecting that if Dick had played with love, he had slaved for ambition. And within a few weeks one of his ambitions was likely to be gratified. He had always desired to represent a great constituency in Parliament. Safe and secure seats had been offered to him; these

he had refused. But his influence had been placed unreservedly at the disposition of his party; and some of his followers maintained that the continuance of that party in power was largely due to the newspapers controlled by him. Upon the eve of breaking up for the holidays, the private secretary of the Prime Minister had intimated that one of the big men was about to retire owing to ill-health, and that Mr. Gasgoyne's great services would at last be adequately rewarded.

"I hold Dick in the palm of my hand," Crystal muttered to herself.

She reached Euston at eight the next morning and drove to Carlton House Terrace. Excitement still sustained her, but her face, even in a designedly flattering mirror, was not a pleasant object to contemplate. Despite the protests of her maid, whom she left behind in town, she took the train to Winchester that same afternoon. For the second time in her life one overpowering desire possessed her: to injure Dorothy.

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Susan Judkins opened the door after a cab had set Crystal down at the gate of the small semi-detached villa in St. Cross Road. Susan was now on the shady side of sixty, but she told herself triumphantly that she neither looked nor felt her age. Moreover, her instincts remained keen. She said afterwards

that she recognised trouble as soon as she saw Crystal's face.

"I have come from Scotland to see Mrs. Armine. Is she at home?"

"Not at home, ma'am."

Dorothy was at home, but the faithful Susan had no intention whatever of ushering an enemy into the presence of an unsuspecting mistress.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"When will she be in?"

"She may be in about dinner time. Leastways, she is not dining out."

Crystal scribbled an address upon a card.

"I am stopping the night at an hotel. I will come back after dinner, unless Mrs. Armine prefers to call upon me."

"Very good, ma'am."

Susan shut the door, and glanced at the thin piece of pasteboard in her hand. Her expression was composed as she murmured: "We've waited eighteen years for this, and we can wait five minutes longer."

She went back to the pantry. Securely locked up in a cupboard stood a bottle of ginger wine used by Susan in moments of depression or when the weather turned cold. Of this cordial she took a full dose, eyeing the card upon the dresser as if it were a cobra. Dorothy was in her garden, a narrow strip at the back full of flowers, which she cultivated herself.

Susan put back the bottle of ginger wine and slammed the cupboard door.

“Lor! How wicked she looked!”

The faithful creature wiped the perspiration from her forehead. In a sense she realised that she was the innocent party to a crime: about to shatter, for ever perhaps, the sweet peace of that garden yonder, to turn it into a wilderness if Crystal had come to take away Min. The soft mellow tone of the Winchester buildings had suffused itself over Susan, softening some hard angles and lines. Upon her the moss had grown imperceptibly as she had taken firmer and deeper root in the friable Hampshire soil. Winchester satisfied her: it was so pre-eminently quiet, respectable, and English. The deep tones of the cathedral bell were celestial music to this ancient handmaiden, whose life had been one long service. From her pantry window she could see the policeman on his beat. Soldiers marched up and down the St. Cross Road past the cemetery where Susan had, in fancy, selected a snug resting-place. There, in the words of the old song, she would “do nothing for ever and ever,” after the interminable labours of sixty years.

“She knows,” said Susan, wiping her eyes.

She had the habit of speaking aloud, particularly when deeply moved. Having once predicted discovery, its fulfilment exasperated her, because, like Dorothy, she had grown to believe in their sanctuary. Those unfortunate persons

who are constrained to live in countries where terrible earthquakes have taken place or upon the slopes of volcanoes will sympathise with Susan Judkins.

"Well, Susan, the fish has not come, I see."

In silence Susan held out Crystal's card which she carried hidden in her hand instead of on a salver, so that the expression of her face might prepare Dorothy for an abominable surprise.

"She's come to tear your heart out, but this time I wasn't fool enough to let her in."

"Ah!" sighed Dorothy, as the card fluttered to the ground. Then, for a moment, mistress and servant, or shall we say rather friend and friend, gazed at each other.

"You think she knows?" faltered Dorothy.

"I know she knows."

"If she has told—Min?"

"She hasn't yet," said Susan grimly. "If she had, he'd have been here first, bless his heart!"

"God help us, Susan!"

"Amen, ma'am."

Dorothy drew off her gardening gauntlets and gazed steadily at the garden once used as a bare yard for hanging out washing, now fragrant with the roses she had planted. Susan followed her thought unerringly.

"Are you going to let her turn us out of this?"

"I shall fight for our Paradise," Dorothy

said. Then, as Susan mumbled Crystal's message, Dorothy's face brightened.

"Susan, I shall go to the hotel."

Susan began to shake.

"Susan——!"

"Oh, ma'am, oh, Miss Dorothy! There's mischief, hatefulness, plain as print on my painted face!"

She burst into sobs. Dorothy tried to comfort her, stroked her rough worn hands, led her to a bench, and sat down beside her.

"That's why I wouldn't let her in. Oh, poor lamb, I'll see her. Wouldn't that be better than ginger wine! I'll bring her to my knees."

Dorothy kissed her.

"Does that mean—yes?"

"Min is legally mine," said Dorothy firmly. Then, with a gentle shake, she added: "When I come back I shall want something very nice to eat. You mustn't neglect my dinner, my dear old Susan. No, don't say anything, I believe that I'm not afraid, that I can hold my own."

"You mean Master Min."

"Yes; I mean him—my son."

She spoke the words proudly. A slight bent and broken Susan went back into the house.

Meantime, Crystal had returned to the hotel and feeling like her humble sister in need

a cordial, had ordered a pint of champagne. The champagne stimulated her intelligence. She told herself that a slight delay might be made profitable. In her haste, she had neglected a cardinal principle of warfare. She had rushed, so to speak, upon the enemy without first acquiring all the knowledge at her disposition. As a greasy, shifty-eyed waiter was uncorking the champagne, she asked a question: "Did he know Mr. Armine, who had played in the Winchester Eleven?" The waiter knew the young gentleman, and his mother, a sweet lady, much respected in the Close and out of it. Within five minutes Crystal had squeezed this orange dry. She tipped him sixpence, having conscientious scruples concerning the over-tipping of servants, and told him he might finish the champagne, of which about half a glass was left. As the man was leaving the room, she told him to show Mrs. Armine up if she happened to call. Then, for the second time, she examined herself in the glass. Her nose being slightly red, she powdered it, smiling maliciously. She added a touch of paint to her lips, frowning because they looked blue.

Some twenty minutes later Dorothy entered the room. At first glance an unobservant stranger might have pronounced Crystal the younger-looking of the two. Her hair, of a fashionable auburn tint, surmounted a face which was an admirable work of art, and a figure seemingly youthful and supple. But if

the complexion appeared free from wrinkles, if no grey hairs could be detected among the auburn tresses, if the slender limbs were those of a girl, nevertheless this shadowy impression of youth revealed mercilessly the solid reality of age. Dorothy perceived that Dick's wife was worn out, jaded, a boggart of a woman painted and bedecked.

What Crystal saw is not so easily described. Dorothy had come straight from the garden, where she had spent so many serene and pleasant hours. About her hung the faint fragrance of roses ; upon her face and in her eyes lay the glow which seems to emanate from places long warmed by sun. Youthful in appearance, none could call her. The hair grew thickly still, but lines lay about the clear eyes and beautiful mouth ; the figure had assumed the gracious dignity of the prime of life ; and perhaps the dominant note of the whole personality was a certain sweet austerity of bearing which stood for and expressed subtly all that she had lost and gained. Crystal regarding her with envious eyes, hating her furiously, perceived this, and, perceiving it, realised her own immeasurable inferiority. As the door closed, she broke into a shrill laugh. Her first words were : " How virtuous you look ! "

Dorothy paused, shocked by the passion which convulsed the other, trying to find a phrase adequate for such a moment. Then

she became conscious that Crystal would find the phrases, that she would need fortitude to listen to them in silence.

"I know—I have guessed—everything."

"Everything?"

Her quiet voice exasperated the other beyond endurance. Carefully considered sentences faded out of her mind. She became primal, elemental: her fingers curled inwards; she showed her teeth in a snarling smile.

"Don't dare to lie to me!"

"What do you know?"

"That you are a fraud and a hypocrite, living here in the odour of sanctity, when you ought to be in——"

"Stop," said Dorothy, holding up her hand. "I have come here at your request; I will answer your questions, but at the first word of abuse I go."

"There never was an Armine."

"If you know everything you know that."

"And I thought you a saint! You are a better actress than I!"

She laughed shrilly. The laugh sounded uncanny to Dorothy: a signal of danger. For the moment she wondered whether Crystal were quite sane.

"You are not well," she murmured, in a different voice.

"Not well? I'm well enough to expose you. And you dare to stand there, brazening it out!"

Dorothy frowned.

"It will be simpler," she said steadily, "if you will tell me exactly what you know and what you want."

Crystal came a step nearer. By this time Dorothy had measured the other's jealousy, nothing more, and was prepared to make allowance for it.

"I know that you have been carrying on a shameful intrigue with Dick for years and that this boy is his son and yours."

Unhappily, Dorothy smiled.

Never once had it occurred to her that Crystal could make such an absurd mistake. She had known that at any moment Min might be revealed to Crystal as Dick's son, and she had always taken for granted that such a demonstration included the corollary that the boy was Crystal's son also. Her smile indicated surprise, relief, and sympathy. Not so was it interpreted by the furious creature opposite. To Crystal, the smile was the culminating insult, the disdainful triumphant challenge of a rival who dared her to do and say her worst. With twitching features and trembling hands she abandoned all restraint. Her voice rose shrilly clear and penetrating.

"You——!"

She used a word to be found in the Bible and in Shakespeare, but unprintable here. Dorothy recoiled as if a terrific blow had struck her. Colour left her cheeks; in her heart some machine seemed to be throbbing with inexor-

able violence, but, dominating every other emotion, pity rose instantly to her lips; and from her fine eyes, so tender and steadfast, an indescribable radiance flashed its message. Crystal, half blind as she was, perceived this amazing transfiguration, and stared open-mouthed, stricken dumb by a power she could not apprehend or withstand. Then Dorothy said in a low voice:

“My poor Crystal, may God help you! Min is Dick's son, who was born to you at Saint-Malo, left by you in Paris, and adopted by me.”

The whole sentence, so often thought out, falling now so quietly and yet so solemnly upon the silence, pierced its way straight to Crystal's heart.

The effect upon her was instantaneous and extraordinary. She staggered forward, staring wildly into Dorothy's eyes, reading in them the whole truth; reading also the pity, the sympathy, the intelligence which, years ago in Vauxhall Bridge Road, had distinguished her from every other woman Crystal had known. Truth presents herself in so many nebulous forms, and human eyes are so ill-adapted to penetrate obscuring mists, that, for the most part, we seldom perceive the goddess until she has passed us by. When she does choose to reveal herself, naked and glorious, the effect of her divine personality is nearly always overwhelming.

“Oh, Christ!” faltered Crystal.

Then Dorothy saw that, unwittingly, she had inflicted a mortal blow. Crystal was collapsing!

Dorothy supported her to a sofa and rang the bell. The greasy, shifty-eyed waiter answered it with suspicious alacrity. He was despatched for restoratives and a doctor. Crystal opened her eyes.

"Don't speak!" said Dorothy.

Crystal's lips closed, not her eyes, into which came a strange expression. What did she see? Perhaps the supreme vision was vouchsafed her: a glimpse of that Eternal Love, absolutely selfless, of which Dorothy's life had been a faint earthly manifestation. Perhaps, she looked back, not forward, seeing every inch of the road down which she had raced so recklessly. How pitifully small were her triumphs now! How drab! She had desired two things inordinately: the acclaim of the multitude and marriage with a man who had never loved her. For these she had sacrificed her child. Did she miss his tears, his strong young arms, his kisses, as the light failed, as the waters rose?

"You made the boy a gentleman," she whispered.

Dorothy placed her hand lightly upon the quivering lips, enjoining silence, but Crystal shook her head.

"I'm done for," she gasped. "And I've something to say. Hold up my head!"

Dorothy did so.

"Don't—let—him—know!"

The cruel struggle for breath overpowered her. Again she repeated:

"Don't—let—the—boy—know!"

She never spoke another articulate word, but the entreaty in her eyes was unmistakable. Dorothy said quickly:

"You wish Min to believe that I am his mother?"

Crystal nodded and closed her eyes as the housekeeper appeared with brandy and sal volatile, unavailingly applied, for long before the doctor came, Crystal had gone, leaving behind that poor, thin, painted mask which—can we doubt it?—she was willing enough at the last to cast aside. Dorothy's tears fell on the hands that long ago had ministered to Dick.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVIL TONGUES

At the inquest (which had to be held) the coroner asked many questions of Mrs. Arden. Her answers to the questions which—so *The Hampshire Independent* declared in a scathing editorial—the paper seemed deliberately to evade or ignore. The waiter, loitering in the passage and not far from the door, testified that he had seen Mrs. Gasgoyne's voice raised in anger. Mr. Judkins—stigmatised as an obstinate and untruthful varicating witness—admitted with reluctance that her mistress had been at home at the time the deceased lady called at the house on St. Cross Road. Mr. Richard Gasgoyne, the servant, seemed to be deeply moved, gave evidence that his wife had left Ben Aber Lodge suddenly, leaving no message behind her other than that she was taking the next train to town. The maid spoke of her mistress's excitement and nervousness during the journey. Finally, Mr. Bodley Skeffington declared his opinion that any undue excitement or shock was likely to have fatal consequences, inasmuch as his

patient was suffering from valvular disease of the heart.

Those who have had the misfortune to be victims of gossip in a cathedral town will not require to be told that Dorothy's name grew rank in the mouth of every man and woman, gentle and simple, in the ancient city. In the opinion of the jury—her own butcher was of their number—she was black as the ace of spades, save where the scarlet letter flared upon her bosom.

Two terrible days followed, because Min arrived. Dorothy saw him reading *The Independent*, saw him tear up the paper, and then glance with hungry interrogation at herself. Tremblingly she asked:

“You trust me, Min?”

“Before all the world,” he answered, kissing her.

“My son, you will do nothing—violent?”

He confessed that horsewhipping was in his mind: the editor was a cur, to be thrashed within an inch of his worthless life. Under entreaty he promised to leave curs unpunished, but Dorothy perceived that her silence was driving him wild.

She had one interview with Gasgoyne in which he implored her to tell, or to allow him to tell, the truth at the inquest: the obvious, the sensible, and ultimately the kindest thing to do. Dorothy refused. She followed his arguments, understood them, sympathised with

them, and saw—Min : Min the target for every eye in the town where he had carried himself so proudly, Min publicly proclaimed to be base-born. And that such a bolt should fall upon him without preparation was to her unthinkable.

“Perhaps I will tell him, but you must give me time,” she said.

“And meanwhile, my poor Dorothy——?”

“Min believes in me.”

This interview, as has been said, took place before the inquest. Immediately afterwards, Dick removed the body to London, deeming it expedient that the funeral should not take place in Winchester.

Moira Curragh came to her friend at once, and she too urged public acknowledgment of the facts, but was silenced sooner than Gasgoyne, being a mother and able to see Min with a mother's eyes. She used her old expression :

“You are a heavenly fool, Doll.”

Upon the Sunday following the inquest Mrs. Chatfield failed to see Dorothy, who happened to leave the cathedral at the same time and by the same door as herself.

“Mum, she cut us dead,” said the furious Min.

“We must suffer such fools gladly,” said Dorothy.

Nevertheless, the cut penetrated below the skin. Dorothy, who in her youth had flouted

convention, who had found life as it is lived in England by such magnates as the Helminghams intensely dull and unprofitable; Dorothy, who had said again and again that freedom was happiness—or—at any rate, its only substitute, now found herself a slave to the traditions at which she had scoffed. Long ago, when Gasgoyne had told her that she hugged her chains, he hit a truth which included fetters other than a child's arms. Dorothy had learned to love places as inseparable from persons. Because she loved Min, she loved also the quiet, picturesque, almost mediæval city to which he owed so much. The cathedral where she had prayed for his welfare, the College Meads and buildings, the copses where they had picked primroses, the silvery stream upon whose banks she had spent so many placid hours—these things had become part of herself. To tear loose from them meant anguish. But as the days passed, as she encountered cold looks and averted eyes, as she saw Min's face twisted by indignation and interrogation, she told herself that she must go.

Some friends, however, stood stoutly by: notably the Heseltines. David called upon her when she was alone, looking much less cool than usual.

"Your mother has been so kind," said Dorothy, profoundly touched by his sympathy. "She came to me at once."

"Yes, yes," he hesitated, slightly flushing "I suppose she didn't give you a hint——"

"A hint?"

"About me."

"Oh!"

Dorothy knew now what was coming. She had apprehended long ago in David Heseltine a feeling for herself warmer than friendship; and she had been conscious, very agreeably conscious, that this feeling was suppressed, because she, on her part, had never given any encouragement to it. In her exclamation was a note of weakness as well as surprise. Heseltine saw that she looked up with startled eyes.

"I have come here, he continued quietly, "to ask you to marry me. Wait! I know that the feeling you may have had for—for your boy's father," she wondered at his choice of words, "is of a different character to what I might hope to inspire in you. Still, life being what it is, a woman such as you must feel at times that it is not easy to stand alone. You look a little tired. Let me offer you this although there is not much in it."

He held out his hand, with a faint smile, as if he were conscious of his own limitations, particularly in the presence of women.

"You have heard what they are saying about me," she faltered, "and out of pity, perhaps——"

"Thank you for the 'perhaps.' Of course you know that it is not pity with me. I love you, and I think you like me. I speak to-day, because you need a man at your side."

"You ask me to marry you."

"For my own sake far more than for yours."

"If—if this scandal is true, if I am a *femme tarée*—"

"Even then I beseech you to marry me."

"What a good fellow you are!"

"From the bottom of my heart, I not only love you; I honour and esteem you more than any other woman."

"Thank you."

A silence followed. Heseltine turned and walked towards the window. Dorothy's eyes followed him, noting the slightly stooping shoulders, the somewhat shabby clothes, the unmistakable air of the man who by reason of his own or by others' infirmities has been forced to halt rather than run through life.

For the moment she was tempted to tell him the truth.

"Mr. Heseltine, my silence must seem so odd to you."

He looked at the pattern of the carpet; then he spoke slowly, as if measuring his words: "As for that, I am, of course, no longer a young man; nothing strikes me as particularly—odd. Surprise is generally a synonym for ignorance, isn't it? I know you now fairly well, I may say, but what you were as a young girl—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I see; at least I have a glimpse. You would be an easy man to live with."

"My mother says so."

"Your mother? What about her?"

"She is ready to abdicate in your favour."

"She is as wonderful as you are. And you would treat me as you treat her: glorifying the best in me, blinding yourself and others to the less admirable qualities. But, my dear friend, have you really counted the cost? Do you think that I could take my place in the collegiate hierarchy, be mistress of a big house, play my part?"

"I am prepared to chuck Winchester. I am not a poor man. I am tired of looking out of college windows. No, I should not dream of asking you to look after a lot of turbulent boys; but one quiet, easy-going man—eh?"

He tried to read her with his pleasant, misty eyes, but she avoided his glance, plainly troubled. She was on the edge of surrender; never had she liked this kind friend so well. And she was so sure of him, so certain that he would not change, that—as he said—he would be very easy to live with.

"Has it struck you that Mr. Gasgoyne may ask me to marry him?"

The abrupt question was a palpable hit.

"No doubt he will," said Heseltine. "Still—" He did not go on. Dorothy knew that Dick's ambitions were in his old friend's possession. Dick had changed. Would Dick be easy to live with? Would he make sacrifices for her sake? She could not answer, but she approved the delicacy in this man asking her first.

"Mr. Heseltine," her voice trembled, "you have done me a very great honour, and I wish that I could say 'Yes,' but I must say 'No.' Nothing else is possible. Nothing else could be possible, seeing that I am I." She held out her hand.

He accepted defeat gallantly, knowing that further attack would be cowardly as well as useless.

"After all, you have Min," he said.

"Yes; I have Min."

Min knew nothing of this proposal. He was very miserable indeed during this first week, although he tried to face calumny valiantly. Too proud to ask his mother for explanations, he told himself that he was old enough and strong enough to share her burdens.

Fate willed that he should hear part of the truth from Parflete, who had been absent at the time of the inquest. Parflete was still Min's friend. From his parents he heard all that was said in Winchester and nearly all that was surmised.

"I wonder Mrs. Armine stays here," bleated Mrs. Parflete.

"She's not the sort to run away," said Billy. "I'm rather surprised that Min has not hurt somebody."

"Poor young man!"

"The money for his Winchester schooling came from Mr. Richard Gasgoyne's solicitors,"

said the banker. The three were dining alone and the servants had left the room. Parflete senior, the most discreet of men, frowned as he spoke; then he added: "I tell you this William, because you are about to be associated with me in business. The coincidence, in itself not remarkable, becomes significant in connection with Mrs. Armine's singular reserve at the inquest."

"And there is a likeness between Mr. Gasgoyne and Min," murmured Mrs. Parflete.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" said Billy.

Next day, directly after breakfast, he called upon Mrs. Armine, and later went for a walk with Min. For some minutes the friends walked side by side in silence; then the red-haired, impetuous Billy burst out: "I simply can't keep my mouth shut. I know that your mater and you are having a deuce of a time and I want to say that I don't believe one of their lies, and that I think your mater the best woman on earth—bar none."

"Good old Billy!" said Min. Parflete saw that he was too moved to say more, but presently, fired by his friend's sympathy, Min allowed his feelings to burst into flame.

"I know nothing, Billy. What are these lies? You're my pal, let's hear them. Tell me what the devils are saying."

At once Billy's cheeks became redder than his hair.

"I c-c-an't."

"You must."

"They are saying you are Mr. Richard Gas goyne's son."

"W-w-w-what!"

Parflete gazed at his friend in dismay. Passion had twisted his face into a horrid caricature of itself.

"There—I oughtn't to have told you. It's a lie, of course."

"The beasts! If I could kill them; wring their cursed necks!"

"Old chap, you must take this quietly."

He laid his hand upon his friend's arm, gripping it tight; but Min flung it off.

"Take it quietly! My God! Thanks for telling me, Billy. You're a pal worth having; but does she—my mother—know this?"

"She must."

"That's why she wouldn't tell me. Now look here, Billy, I must fight this out alone; I—I must walk it off. My head is buzzing. Dash it! I can't see you distinctly: the whole beastly world seems blurred. But I'll be all right soon. Only leave me to get my bearings, like a dear, good chap!"

Billy went without another word. Min hurried away to a wood some four miles from Winchester.

There he flung himself down to pass a bitter hour. It was a lovely day in October, and the trees were still in full leaf although the beeches were turning yellow. The wood overhung a

valley of grass land running into down. Here sheep were grazing. Farther on lay the snug homestead: the round ricks, the thatched barns, the farmhouse, glowing red out of the pretty garden which encompassed it. The whole represented pastoral England at its best—a landscape saturated with the unadulterated essence of Arcadia, a scene dear to all Englishmen in remote parts of the earth, a mirage to be evoked and tenderly welcomed in desert places. Min, for the first time in his life, contemplated the picture with a cold and ironic gaze. For him the charm had faded. Mind and eye penetrated beneath the smooth surface of things. The pond which shone with such silvery radiance was stagnant water, teeming with baleful germs; the homestead was situated in a low and insanitary position; the soil upon these Hampshire hills lay thin and sterile, too unprofitable to cultivate. The farmer, whom Min knew, was losing money each year, clinging desperately to the old home because his father and grandfather had lived and died there, yet fully aware that conditions had changed, and that he, willy-nilly, must abandon the barren acres. "I am a fool," he had said. "I ought to have seen things as they are long ago."

Min recalled these words as he stared moodily at the sheep grazing placidly, oblivious of the butcher. A fortnight before he had reckoned himself the most fortunate of young men. He

had stalked and killed handsomely his first stag, a fine ten-pointer; he was in perfect health; he was enjoying to the utmost every minute of his holiday. A fortnight ago he had been a sheep, a fool!

He sat up, swearing that he would remain a fool no longer, even if the forsaking of folly meant the loss of folly's paradise. The world was not what it seemed to the young and green, and the men and women in it also were other than what they appeared.

He began to walk up and down, staring no longer at the enchanted valley, but at the ground at his feet. A subtle reaction began to work in him as youth and manhood made themselves heard. There were sheep and fools and devils in the world, but he need not be of them. One thing was certain: his mother needed him. If she had not spoken to him, if she had withstood his mute interrogation, if she had borne uncomplainingly the cruel burden of calumny, consideration for him, not herself, had been at the back of her reserve.

He rehearsed for the thousandth time what he believed to be the truth. He knew that Gasgoyne had been an old friend, whence had sprung this hideous scandal. And, doubtless, Armine, his father, was an obscure person in Mrs. Grundy's eyes. In marrying Armine, Dorothy had estranged her relations—snobs, no matter who they might be. Then Armine had died, and the widow had been too proud

to go back to her own people. She had remained faithful to her dead husband and his son.

Letting his mind dwell on Dorothy, Min felt himself to be softened by her never-failing love and devotion. That such a creature should suffer and suffer alone became intolerable. He had the right to demand her fullest confidence he would demand it within the hour.

He turned his face towards Winchester.

Meanwhile, Dorothy was sitting in her tiny drawing-room, reading a long editorial about Gasgoyne. On her lap was a note from him received that morning. He wrote, in his usual abrupt, incisive manner, to say that he was in Winchester: "to see you, Doll, and to protect you."

She had blushed when she read the letter but she was pale enough now, reading the lines and between the lines of the article. Thanks to his almost unique position in the newspaper world, details concerning the inquest at Winchester had not been printed in the London papers. The world knew that he had lost his wife suddenly, upon the eve of a political contest, and, accordingly, the world offered its sympathy. The writer of the editorial dealt with the domestic affliction in a few gracious and sympathetic phrases; then he proceeded to forecast the future career that awaited the bereaved man.

"We cannot doubt" (ran the article) "that Mr. Gasgoyne has honestly earned the confidence of his country. He is of the stuff of which great administrators are fashioned. To see him, to hear him, to trace and retrace the steps by which he has reached his present position is to be reminded irresistibly of such men as Clive and Warren Hastings—men filled with a splendid audacity and all-conquering personality not to be daunted by any obstacles, however seemingly insurmountable. . . ."

Dorothy re-read Dick's concluding lines :

"I send you a clipping from a morning paper not controlled by me. But my successful candidature is by no means certain."

Dorothy hid both letter and cutting as Min came through the gate and ran up the steps leading to the front door. A minute later he was standing before her with a look upon his face she had never seen. At this moment his likeness to his father became almost uncanny. He took her hands, pressed them gently, and kissed her cheek.

"Thank God, I am a man," he said.

She knew then that the moment she had dreaded for so many years had come.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"That I am old enough and strong enough, mother, to share your burdens."

Dare we blame her that she temporised?

"My burdens, Min?"

"Mother, don't play with me! Is it fair? I

have heard what they are saying in this town. And, before we fight the enemy, we must hold a council of war."

His glance, his firm tone, dominated her. She sat down trembling. Her swift acquiescence slightly perplexed him. She had the air of a timid woman, of one who shrinks from what is disagreeable—an attitude so alien to her that he eyed her doubtfully.

"You have always been so plucky."

She smiled faintly. How could she tell him that she was horribly afraid for him, not for herself? He continued slowly:

"I can understand how you feel: you, the purest woman in the world." He paused for a moment to grapple with and subdue his rage. Presently he spoke with greater restraint: "Mother, do you know what they are saying?"

"I can—guess."

"Before we face this accursed thing together, is there nothing you have to say to me first?"

"Yes."

He sat down beside her and took her hand. Often, lying awake at night, she had wondered with what words she would break the truth, or part of it, to him. Now she found herself speechless, unprepared, hesitating whether to begin at the beginning or the end.

"Tell me what you have heard," she whispered.

"Oh, mother, must I? I can't—I can't."

"They are saying, Min, that Richard Gasgoyne is your father."

"Yes."

She laid her head against his broad shoulder, hiding her face. He felt her hand fluttering in his as a hideous doubt assailed him. If it were true——? Why did she take this lie so meekly? His cheeks were blazing as he drove doubt from him.

"Mother?"

"Yes, my son."

"Look at me!"

She raised her tender eyes to his.

"I want to say this. I believe in you as I believe in God. An angel from heaven couldn't shake my faith in you. I know that this is a cruel and damnable lie. Mother!"

She had risen, and clung to him pitifully. The pride in his voice, his assured bearing, his faith in herself, overwhelmed her. She heard him murmuring caressing phrases, felt his kisses upon her eyes and forehead, and wished passionately that the truth had been made plain from the beginning. For the first time she realised that she had made a mistake; she ought to have foreseen this moment.

Min was speaking hurriedly, trying to console, but wondering vaguely why she had broken down so utterly.

"I have thought it all out. You met my father; he was not quite of your class; you loved him, and married him; then he had to

leave you—and was killed. Your own people behaved like beasts! Oh, I see it all, you poor little mother! And now the ice is broken between us, and together we'll face this outrageous scandal, and fight it."

"Together, yes; but——"

"You told me Mr. Gasgoyne cared for you once, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"He married the wrong woman, anyway. And because he was so nice to me, she started this—this lie. Everything is growing clear; but, mother, you must tell me more about my own father: all about him. I—I don't care a hang if he wasn't a swell. He must have been the right sort or you wouldn't have married him. But tell me who he was, now."

Still she hesitated, seeing his ardent face, his ingenuous, troubled smile.

"Mother, you must tell me. I—I insist."

"Min, be kind to me! Oh, Min, if I could spare you, if I could lie to you——"

"Lie to me?" His face grew very black.

"I would do it; yes, I would, ten thousand times, to spare you, but it's too late. I daresay I have been foolish, incredibly foolish——"

"For God's sake, mother, tell me the worst at once!"

"Min, Richard Gasgoyne is your father."

He stared at her till again she hid her face upon his shoulder.

"What do you say?" She hardly recognised his voice.

"He is your father."

"My father! Then he abandoned you; he married another woman, he——"

"I would have kept it from you for ever if I could. He wished you to know long ago; it would have been wiser and easier for you."

"Curse him!"

"Min!"

To her unutterable dismay and distress he broke into virulent abuse of Gasgoyne. For the moment she was too confounded to account for this amazing indignation; then she clearly saw the nature of the quagmire into which her confession had plunged them. Gasgoyne had loved, had gone away, had been counted as dead, but why, on his return to life, had he married another woman? That offence was abominable, incredible, unpardonable. And if she cleared him, she must break Min's heart and her own by telling him the name of his real mother. In this tangle of misery, one thing only flickered. She must temporise. Min's concluding words fell upon her distracted ears.

"And now he wants me to go into his business, to step into his shoes. As if I would! I repudiate him, as he repudiated you. I'll never call him father. I won't be beholden to him for another farthing. *Mother!*"

He paused for a moment.

"I entreat you to calm yourself, Min."

"Calm myself! Great heavens! Did—did he pay for my schooling at Winchester?"

"Yes."

"I'll work like a slave till I pay him back. And you accepted it? Oh, mother!"

"For your sake. How could I refuse? And, in time——"

"Never, *never*, NEVER!"

"Min!"

He turned from her roughly for the first time in his life.

"How could you meet him? That day at Margate—and since!"

He rushed out of the room; she heard the front door slam with a violence that appalled her.

CHAPTER XIX

A DRAMATIC MOMENT

DOROTHY'S first analysable emotion was the conviction that she had lost her son, that never again would he look at her with the love and respect which the devotion of eighteen years had inspired. She repeated despairingly that she had acted for the best, and repeating this knew that she ought to have foreseen this hour, and foreseeing it would have acted differently. She sent for Susan. When she had told her faithful old friend everything, she added deplorably: "I am a fool, a sentimental fool. You have always known it; Lady Curragh has known it; Mr. Gasgoyne knows it. Oh, Susan, comfort me, for I am the most miserable and perplexed woman in England!"

Susan was wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron, and in sore need of comfort herself, but she plucked up spirit to answer tartly:

"Women always think themselves fools when things go wrong. As for me, I'd sooner blame Providence who made us as we are. So far as I can see, and my sight's none o' the best now, there's only one thing to be done. You've told

him half the truth, tell him all of it, and let be quit of lies for ever and ever."

"That's your advice, is it? Well, I call it heartless." Being distracted, she vented some of her wrath upon Susan, as the best of women will do upon occasion. "Yes; heartless. I am to whitewash myself, hold myself up as a sort of saint, and push poor Crystal deeper into the dirt."

"Master Min is young and strong."

"That's it; if he were older and wiser could tell him."

"If you don't tell him, his father will."

"What? Break his word to me? And Min won't speak to his father again; he is furious with him, because——"

"Yes, yes," interposed Susan testily; "and he'll tell him to his face what he thinks of him. And at the first opportunity, too. It's lucky Mr. Gasgoyne is in London."

"He's in Winchester," said Dorothy.

"Lor! And we chattering here!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Master Min has gone straight to his father. Take my word for it."

"He doesn't know where he is."

"He'll soon find him."

"Susan! If they should be together now?"

"It wouldn't surprise me a little bit. I'll get your jacket and hat at once."

Some sort of action seemed the one thing possible. Susan bustled upstairs; Dorothy

tried to recall whether or not she had spoken to Min at breakfast of Dick's arrival. She was quite sure that she had not. At any rate no time was to be lost. Dick might appear unexpectedly; he was likely to meet Min in the street. She must see him first to warn him, to entreat his forbearance and patience with headstrong youth.

Awaiting Susan, she walked to the window just in time to see Min striding up the path. She heard his step in the hall, and the next moment he had entered the room and taken her in his arms.

"I have been a beast," he cried. "Oh, mother, I rushed off without a word, like a madman; but I've come back to tell you how I love you. At any rate I have—you. You are mine, all mine. I don't care what has happened, you believe that? It makes no difference, except that I love you more. Oh, poor little mother, how could I leave you?"

And she had doubted him!

Perhaps at this moment Dorothy reaped the first fruits of her reward. This was in truth her very son claiming her as his own. A warm glow suffused every fibre of her being. She had not been foolish; she had been wise. What sustained Min in his hour of agony was the reflection that he was *her* flesh and blood. She heard the eager passionate voice: "I would sooner be your son than the son of an empress. Say you believe me!"

"I do, I do."

"We'll get out of this sickening place. I have thought it all out," (he had been absent less than half an hour!) "we can go to Canada. We shall stick together. My God! how I work for you. Oh, you poor little mother!"

He kept on repeating this phrase, indicating his absorbing consideration for her, the rejection of self: being afire to console, to compensate, to protect.

"You are my son, my dear, dear son."

The words were uttered as if they were sacrament. She was so proud of him that a note of triumph became audible to the young man. He said quickly: "You are not ashamed of me?"

"Ashamed of you? Never. What you have been to me, you can never know. Before you could speak, when your tiny arms clung to me—when I thought that you were to be taken from me—ashamed? Never think that, my darling."

"You shall be proud of me yet. I swear it. Hullo!"

A discreet tap at the door was heard. Susan Judkins was descending with Dorothy's thing in her hand, when Min rushed back into the house. Whereupon Susan hastily laid down her jacket and hat upon a chair and retired, not to her pantry, where much work awaited her, but to the bedroom upstairs whence an extended view of the St. Cross Road was obtained.

"It's Susan," said Dorothy; then in a swift whisper, she added: "Susan knows, but say nothing to her now. Come in!"

Susan entered, rather tottery.

"Mr. Gasgoyne is coming down the road," she gasped out and fled.

"He dares to come here?" exclaimed Min. At once his manner changed with a swift transition from tenderness to hardness. It was Crystal's son who spoke.

"I shall speak to him."

"No."

"Mother, I must—and alone."

"No, no."

"Then I speak in your presence."

"So be it." She resigned herself to the inevitable, unable to struggle against too strong circumstance. "Only remember that he is your father—and he loves you."

"I can only remember that he outraged and deserted you."

There was not time to exchange another word. Min went to the farthest corner of the room, Dorothy stood trembling near the door.

Gasgoyne—it may be imagined—had not come to Winchester without definite purpose. Indefiniteness he had always despised as the clumsy, amorphous mark-of-thumb of a weakling. Such men, moreover, never look back, except possibly with the intention of noting

past mistakes so as to avoid similar blunders in the future.

As he walked down the St. Cross Road, he had never been so sensible of his power, and in particular that ability to adjust what most men regarded as inadjustable. Crystal was dead and buried. He had regained freedom. He walked as if he rejoiced in this freedom, holding his head high, turning his glance upon the foot-passengers he met. The St. Cross Road, part indeed of the famous highway between London and Southampton, stretched straight and wide in front of him. At this moment he was thinking of Southampton and of the lure of that vast empire beyond, in whose government he had such an ever-increasing interest. He was thinking also of Dorothy, of what she had endured for his sake, and of the reparation he was about to offer. He knew, none better, what the world was saying of her. He was aware of what influence he had brought to bear to keep her name out of the great newspapers; and he knew that his future, if he married her, depended upon the purification of that name.

Busy as he had been during the past week, his most strenuous thought had been given to this: the solving of a domestic problem. And the solution, now that he had reached it, seemed so obvious. This young man, his son, must be told the whole truth, foolishly withheld so long; Dorothy's good name must

be vindicated privately and publicly. The Helminghams, the Curraghs, Lady Ipswich, would undertake this duty. Gasgoyne, too much in the public eye to be sensitive, had told himself that the kingdom should ring with the story of Dorothy's self-sacrifice. What she had done was superb, epic, but not common-sense. He, however, would adjust that.

In this spirit of not unnatural self-inflation he entered Dorothy's drawing-room.

Instantly he perceived that he had come at a dramatic moment. What to others might have seemed coincidence, to Gasgoyne appeared co-ordination. He had passed through too many dramatic moments not to be aware of their value to the man who has a sense of them: that *flair* which is often mistaken for genius. His subordinates said that their chief had a gift for arriving "on time."

Dorothy spoke first. On such occasions, Gasgoyne took care that the other person should always speak first. She saw him glance at Min, standing with his back to him; Dick's thick eyebrows raised themselves.

"He knows that he is *our* son," she whispered.

"Um!" growled Gasgoyne. He hesitated for one moment, then he approached the young man.

"Min——"

The young man met his father's eyes, but ignored the outstretched hand. It was an

axiom of Gasgoyne's to forestall accusation by self-accusation.

"Of course you think me an unspeakable blackguard," he said tentatively.

"Yes."

"Just so. I daresay you feel murderous?"

"You cannot feel as I feel—why try?"

"I have done you the greatest injury a father can do his son, but"—he shrugged his massive shoulders—"words are cheap, eh? Do I alter what I have done by grovelling to you, by saying that I am sorry? No. The wrong has been done. It can't be wiped out, or—minimised. I treat you as a man. What remains? Shall we say compensation? Will you look with me, not backward but ahead?"

"I refuse—compensation from you. I won't take a farthing; what you have spent upon me, I'll pay back some day."

"This is nonsense. Forgive the word; I can't think of another that would not hurt you."

The boy—let us remember that he was not yet nineteen—might have remained proof against everything except Gasgoyne's unconscious assumption of superiority. Suddenly he burst out with violence:

"You treat me as a man, you say; but you look at me as if I were a child! You're my father, are you? I don't want such a father. Murderous? Yes; I could kill the cur who slunk off and left her—"

"Min!"

"Let him speak," said Dick.

The boy's passion of rage seemed to shiver itself against his impassivity. From this moment the force of it, its intensity and volume broke into fragments. He continued interjectionally, as Gasgoyne used to speak in those far-off days when he became excited:

"You deserve to be killed. To ruin her—such a woman: the sweetest, the best. And to marry instead a——"

"My wife is dead," said Gasgoyne, with his eyes on the boy's face.

"You killed her, too."

"Min, I implore you—you don't know—you——"

"Let him finish," commanded Gasgoyne. "This is my affair, Doll, not yours. Go on, boy!"

"I'll never speak to you again, so I may as well finish. I loathe the very sight of you. You coward and cad!"

"Well crowed!" said Gasgoyne. "At your age I couldn't have done better. Now, unless you have more to say, or unless you are thinking of personal assault, will you be good enough to leave us, unless"—he looked curiously at Dorothy—"unless you, Dorothy, see your way to prove to this young gentleman that even the devil is not so black as youth and inexperience and ignorance may paint him."

A pause followed. Something in Gasgoyne's

tone challenged Min's attention ; very vaguely he became aware that Gasgoyne's acceptance of these insults was significant ; that beneath the impassive, slightly contemptuous surface ran currents and cross-currents of which he had no cognisance. Glancing from his father to Dorothy, he marked an extraordinary expression of indecision, fear, and acute distress forming itself upon her face. As he watched her, frowning, she fluttered towards him, laying an entreating hand upon his shoulder.

"Min, he is right ; you don't know—everything. You have been hasty, unjust. Will you leave us for a moment ?"

"If you wish it." He moved slowly to the door, and, turning on the threshold, came back a few paces, intently regarding her. Gasgoyne, with a shrug of the shoulders, had walked to the window. Again the boy tried to read the face of the woman whom he had revered as immaculate and impeccable.

"Mother," he said hoarsely, "before I go, I—" He paused irresolutely, trying to soften what must be said, floundering in a sea of phrases. "If I do not know everything, that is not my fault, is it ? He speaks of—compensation. Perhaps he has come here, now that his wife is dead, to—to offer you what—what you are too proud to take, aren't you ? We have each other, mother, and there is not room in our lives for him." Then, unable to interpret the expression on her troubled face,

carried away by the fear that possessed him, he concluded almost brutally: "If he asks you to choose between him and me——"

Gasgoyne stared out of window, while mother and son tried to read each other's hearts.

"Go," said Dorothy softly. She put out her hands and pushed him from her, very gently. To him the action was unmistakable. He shrank back and walked out of the room.

"He is the right sort," said Gasgoyne, coming towards her. "We shall make something of him."

"We?" her lips trembled.

"My dear Dorothy, what do you suppose has brought me here? Come, come, this scene has been too much for you. Sit down; let us talk comfortably."

He took her hand, pressed it tenderly, and led her to the sofa. For a moment he waited, as if conceding to her the right to speak first. As she said nothing, he continued quietly but emphatically:

"You had an opportunity just now. Shall I tell you that I contrived it? More: that I foresaw what would happen, that in a sense I rather enjoyed being called a coward and a cad. What a loyal son he will make after this!"

"After this?"

He looked at her steadily. With a slight

intake of his breath, and in a subtly different tone, he exclaimed :

"Surely you intend to tell him the truth now."

"Why?"

"Why?" He rose up, agitated for the first time. When Dick saw anything clearly that might be obscure to others, his impatience and disdain were certain to be shown. "Good heavens! You ask—why? Our future, his future, depends upon it. My dearest, listen! This great political opportunity is within my grasp; but I will not deny to you that what has happened here may—I don't say it will—but it *may* do me a serious injury. I have enemies; England is Puritan; the Nonconformists have tremendous weight with the Prime Minister. I saw him yesterday, and he hinted at an explanation; not in words, but you—understand?"

"I understand."

"It may be touch and go. I asked him to trust me; he has most generously done so. But, Dorothy, there's something I want more than any honour. I want you, Dorothy Fairfax, with every stain wiped from you. I want your people, your old friends, all England to know what manner of woman you are."

"And Min?"

"Are you going to let him live and die believing me to be cad and coward?"

She put her hands to her face. She remembered what Min had said about the

woman who was hanged in Winchester gaol. She saw his face. But, overmastering this memory, was the tremendous fact that she was being asked to give up her son, to renounce her motherhood. And she knew that Gasgoyne, being the man he was, could never understand her feelings.

"It would break his heart and mine," she murmured.

"Nonsense! Forgive me, Doll, but men's hearts are rather tougher than you suppose. What difference will it make?"

"That you should ask that!"

"I do ask it—as a right. The whole truth must be told. Everything will be adjusted. You will take your proper position in the world again as my dear wife. And I can make the world receive him as my son."

"But never mine!"

"You are distracted."

"Oh, Dick, I am indeed."

"Then let me think and act for you." He tried to gain possession of her hand, but she evaded his grasp. Her brain seemed to be melting, because the demand upon it was too great. But the sure instinct of a woman told her that the gain of a father would never compensate Min for the loss of his mother. He had used the word flesh and blood—and rightly. He was bone of her bone; her bowels yearned over him. In this supreme moment she regarded Gasgoyne with hostile

eyes, because he was about to tear her asunder from her son. And he knew it. She saw his jaw set, his eyes grow cold.

"He stands between us. Well, it has come to a choice between him and me. Which are you going to take?"

"If I could see plainly——"

"I see plainly. You love him, Crystal's son, better than you do me. Look at me! Deny it if you can."

She raised her eyes to his.

"It is true," she replied simply.

He glared at her, speechless, unable to believe his ears, assured that he had triumphantly forced the situation.

"Then keep him," he answered violently. Mastering himself, he spoke the final words deliberately: "The day may come when he will regret this; you are taking my bread from your son's mouth."

For the third time she heard a door slam between herself and him.

CHAPTER XX

REVELATION

WHEN Min left the drawing-room, he paused for a moment and then ran upstairs. Upon the landing he encountered Susan. Afterwards Susan confessed that never in her life had she been so flustered as at that moment, which accounts adequately for what followed. Her head whirled, but the instinct to console remained paramount. She followed Min into his room and shut the door. Blinded as the boy was by passion and misery, the love and fidelity of his old nurse flared across his vision.

"Oh, Susan," he said, "I have lost her."

"My pore lamb! Then you know——"

"I know everything."

At this moment indignation entered into the soul of Susan Judkins. It seemed incredible that Dorothy should allow Min to bear this crushing blow alone, but the fact stared her in the face, bellowed in her ears.

"I have lost her."

He flung himself upon his bed, face down upon the pillow. Susan watched him with compressed lips and nervously moving fingers.

She burned to comfort him, but she did not know what to say.

Min, perhaps, was conscious of her presence but it made no difference; he was past the stage of sensitiveness to outward things and persons. In his brain festered the conviction that his mother was about to accept as her husband the man who had caused her and her children indescribable anguish. That she should do this undermined everything he had held to be good and true. Was she shameless? She would have killed the man who dared say so, but her face when he left her was unrecognisable. If she had struck Gasgoer when he suggested that hideous word, compensation, he could have fallen at her feet and adored her. But she—she intended to accept it. Is it surprising that he told Susan he had lost her?

“My pore lamb!”

She sat down by the bed, anxiously regarding him, seeing him as helpless baby, as urchin, as schoolboy, seeing him always as wild and ardent, now abased, wild with misery. The tears gathered in her eyes and fell slowly down her wrinkled cheeks. She was furious because her tongue and wits, ordinarily nimble, now seemed palsied; she felt that her mistake had failed, and that it behoved her not to trust. Maternal instincts had bloomed long ago in her heart, their fragrance had sweetened unnumbered hours. She wondered if Master Min

any idea of the strength of her love. Very tentatively she put out her hand, stained and wrinkled by the service of so many years, and touched the head upon the pillow.

“Master Min——”

He made no answer, but the hand was not shaken off as she had feared it would be.

“Master Min, you have lost her in a way of speaking, but don't let her think you think so.”

Min growled out: “I must, I must. Do you suppose that things can go on as they were? Oh, Susan!”

She saw him writhe, and the pain in her own heart loosened her tongue.

“Master Min, I'm only a foolish old woman, but I know that things and persons are never quite so bad as they may seem, never! I'm not going to say a word against pore Mrs. Gasgoyne, but she did desert you, and if my Miss Dorothy had never given up her whole life for you, where would you have been to-day, Master Min?”

“What?” He sat up, galvanised into nervous activity. Susan, with eyes dimmed by tears, continued hurriedly:

“I said at the time we was making an 'ole-and-corner affair of it, but we acted for the best, Master Min. You must always believe that, and now that she can be happy, you ought to thank God, hard though it may be for you to do it. Why, Master Min!”

Min had grasped both her hands, and was holding them firmly, staring into her dim eyes.

"Susan, when did Mrs. Gasgoyne desert me?"

Certainly he had his father's great gift of going straight to the point. Susan had just made what appeared to him the most astounding statement he had ever heard.

"When you was a baby."

"Did she?"

"Surely they told you that."

"No: they didn't tell me—that."

He let go of her hands and walked to the window. Outside the sun shone clearly in a rain-washed sky, but the dust of the universe seemed to have got into his head. By accident Susan had revealed a great secret. He could not grasp it as yet, but he must ask more questions, he must dissemble for a little while. With his back turned towards his old nurse, he asked quaveringly:

"Who was she then?"

"A pore actress at one o' the 'alls." H's forsook poor Susan in moments of stress.

"Then she was not a—lady?"

"She called herself one," replied Susan desperately.

"Susan," he said, "you have let the cat out of the bag. Now you must tell me everything."

Susan, gaping at him, utterly confounded, said "Lor!"

"Begin at the beginning," he commanded.

He was very pale, but he spoke quietly, although emphatically. Men desperately wounded in battle have frequently recorded the fact of their insensibility to severe wounds inflicted after they have been first stricken down. It is certain that for the moment Min hardly realised that he was not Dorothy's son, or rather the intelligence found him unable to feel it, although he could see and hear it, because his sensibilities were benumbed by previous suffering. At his curt words, Susan broke down, sobbing bitterly, protesting that her mistress would never forgive her. However, she managed to sob out most of the story, and perhaps her artless recital increased rather than diminished the pathos and irony of it. Min listened in silence, conscious that he was isolated, that he could see and understand everything from the point of view of an outsider. But to himself, he kept on thinking: "She is speaking of me, of *me!* I was left in a Foundling Hospital. I have no name."

"We acted for the best," wailed Susan Judkins.

She had punctuated every phrase with this.

"Of course you did," said Min. He took her hand and patted it. "Dry your eyes, Susan. I can't take it in, that's a fact, but you acted for the best—I know that."

"God bless you, Master Min!"

"You poor old dear, you're shaking like a jelly."

His sympathy for others, always his most gracious characteristic, began to flow again. Susan's distress made a sudden and overpowering demand upon it.

"Stop it!" he commanded. "You are not to blame."

"You said you'd lost her, Master Min."

"So I did. I meant something else. Never mind, Susan; look here, howling won't help any of us. And I want your help—most awfully."

He sat down on the edge of his bed, staring at her. The youthfulness of his face had faded out of it.

"I'm rattled," he muttered, putting his hand to his eyes as if to brush away obscuring films. "I'm dazed, Susan. I cannot think why she—she——"

"She!" echoed Susan disdainfully. "If you want to break the tenderest heart in the world, you'll go on calling her 'she' instead of 'mother.'"

His features softened.

"Why did mother do this for me, Susan?"

"Master Min, seein' as you're a man, which ain't your fault, of course, I don't know as you'll ever be able to understand that. But I'll do my best to tell you. Your mother took care of you first, because she loved your father; and she took care of you secondly, because she loved

you. She's never said so to me, but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that at the very first she hated you nearly as much as I did, and now I believe you're the greatest thing on earth to her—yes : the greatest."

"What an angel!"

"You may say that, Master Min."

There was a long pause.

The slam of the door below echoed through the small house; then, quite distinctly, Gasgoyne's step was heard in the hall, and the slam of the hall door. Min went to the window. Gasgoyne was going away. At the wicket he turned, looking back. Min could see his face plainly : not the face of a successful lover! It was twisted by anger and humiliation : the humiliation of defeat overpowering one who has a right to reckon himself a conqueror.

"He is going," said Min. "Oh, Susan, she has sent him away without—without——"

He did not finish his sentence, for the expression on Susan's face struck him dumb.

"I told you that you was the greatest thing in the world to her."

"Susan—I—I must go to her. She's alone."

But Susan held up her hand with a gesture familiar in nursery days.

"You stay here, Master Min. When she's ready, your mother will come to you. You won't have to wait long."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when Min heard Dorothy's step on the stairs.

"Susan, you *must* say something: give her a hint."

The door opened, and Dorothy stood on the threshold. Min saw that her eyes were full of anxiety for him. She glanced, puzzled, from Susan to him. Then Susan said abruptly:

"Miss Dorothy, I've let it out. I always knew I should. You won't forgive me, I dare say, but——" she paused, adding defiantly: "but I've forgiven myself already."

With that she rushed past Dorothy into the passage.

"Mother!"

Outside Susan heard that word come from the boy's throat with a scream, and he heard also Dorothy's gasp as Min's arms nearly strangled her. The old nurse smiled.

"He's going to be her own true son now," she muttered.

Of what passed between mother and son we shall say nothing. We may indicate—no more—certain mental phases. Is it too much to affirm that in losing his mother, Min gained her for ever? Dorothy's devotion, her love, her tenderness, became infinitely enhanced, because he was not of her flesh and blood. The mystery of it touched him to issues higher than he had yet contemplated. Not then, but afterwards, he realised, with intense reverence, that such love, purged of all earthly taint, was (to him at any rate) a divine revelation of that

greater Impersonal love from which it emanated. We shall see that such knowledge inspired in him an ardent desire to be worthy of it, to cast aside for ever what was mean, and false, and fleshly.

Presently, Dorothy went to her own room, and Min, somewhat furtively, slipped out of the house. Gasgoyne, at his hotel, was packing a bag when his son came in.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Dick.

"I'm sorry," said Min. "I called you hard names, sir, but I didn't know."

"You didn't know—eh? And how much do you know now?"

"Everything," said Min. "I beg your pardon, sir."

They shook hands, and Min talked. He had not said much when Gasgoyne lit a cigar. Before the boy was half through, Gasgoyne had let it go out: a thing of rare occurrence with him. He threw it away and lit another, watching Min with growing interest. The hostility in his glance flared up now and again, and then died down. Sometimes he felt that his own son was speaking; at others the conviction inflamed him that the speaker was the obstacle between himself and the woman he wanted. At the end, he nodded approvingly.

"You've had a knock-out," he said, "but you've picked yourself up pretty quick, and I'm glad you had the sense to come here at once on your account and on mine."

"But I came on hers," said Min.

"Hers?" For the moment he did not understand. "Oh! I see, I see. You came on hers, did you? She didn't suggest——"

"Never!" exclaimed Min angrily.

"There, there! Keep your temper. You expect me to go back to her?" Min nodded. "Well, I shall not do so, because"—he smiled grimly—"because a woman's heart can only hold one man at a time. For the moment you occupy the premises, but when you go——"

"When I go, sir?"

"You can call me 'father' if you like. My boy, I shall talk straight to you. I never could talk straight to your——"

"*Mother*," said Min. He scored, but he didn't know it.

"I have never talked straight to your—mother. It's a queer thing, but I don't think quite straight when I'm with her. She muddles me."

"Me, too, sometimes."

"What are your plans?"

"I suppose I shall try to make a home for her somewhere, unless——"

"Go on!"

"Unless you offer her one."

"But she won't take what I offer, because of you. Look here: at Margate long ago she had a moment of—call it weakness, if you like. I knew that I had her in my hand—so! She was mine, mine! God! how I wanted her! But

you, a baby, you and your claims outweighed me and mine."

"Thank God!" said Min.

"Same thing to-day, when there are no moral barriers, you stand in the way."

"I'll get out of the way, if it's best for her."

"Will you? You're a good fellow, Min. You're hard hit, as I said, and you must be seeing stars. When my father died, when I found myself penniless and homeless, I saw stars too. By George! everything in me seethed and rotted; but out of the rot came the new growth: strong, green, vigorous. I'd been a mannikin; fighting for my own hand made a man of me. Do you want to fight for your own hand, as I did?"

"Yes," said Min.

"Then I'll help you, and I won't hurt her. She wants you, let her keep you. You speak French well, don't you? Well, I can give you a billet in Paris. It will be hard work, day in and night out, and you'll have to start at the foot of the ladder."

"When can I begin?"

His father looked at him; then he held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said.

For a moment father and son eyed each other.

When Dick spoke his voice had lost all inflection of superiority. He said simply:

"She wishes the world to believe you to be

her own son. Tell her from me that I am willing it should be so. Tell her,"—he paced up and down the room, frowning—"tell her that your future shall be my care."

"You are very generous."

"Am I? Um!"

Min looked nervous; then, after a moment's hesitation, he said abruptly: "You are going away?" He looked at the bag half open and half packed.

"There is nothing to keep me here now," said Gasgoyne, but he looked with even more acute attention at the flushed cheeks of his son.

"If you would do me a favour——"

"Well?"

"Stay here for twenty-four hours!"

Dick was about to speak, but he shut his mouth quickly, a gesture of his when perplexed.

"I know what I'm about," added Min with dignity.

"I'll stay."

"Thank you—father."

"I see you don't want me to ask any questions."

"I would rather you didn't. Would it bother you to write a line to your Paris people about me?"

"What? Now?"

"If you don't mind."

Again Gasgoyne stared at his son, recognising his own qualities reproduced so strongly, and yet with variations as strong.

"All right. I know how you feel."

He sat down at once and wrote a letter, enclosing it in an unsealed envelope.

"That will do."

"Thanks. Good-bye."

They shook hands quietly, as Englishmen will in moments of stress. Possibly the elder man was the more moved of the pair. When Min left the room, the father sat down frowning, glancing at his bag, thinking of the many things in town which clamoured for attention, but dismissing them with an impatient frown. His mind settled itself on Dorothy and Min.

Next day, very early in the morning, Min and Susan might have been seen in earnest conversation: what the Irish call "colloguing." Dorothy remained in bed; spent by what had passed. Min had come in as usual to kiss her, and she had wondered at the freshness and energy upon his face. But since their long talk together in Min's bedroom he had said nothing either of the past or the present. Dorothy was content that it should be so. Her brain and body needed rest. But he, the principal sufferer, appeared to be restored, to be himself. Only when he left her, he kissed her again several times with a warmth and tenderness which she was able to interpret afterwards.

Meanwhile, he had written two letters—never a very congenial task. One was

addressed to Gasgoyne; the other was written and rewritten several times, although it filled only half a sheet of ordinary writing paper. This letter he sealed and gave to Susan, whose face was a shade redder than usual, and whose scanty hair pulled back so tightly that her eyes seemed to be bulging from her head. Withal she assumed an expression of triumph as if she reckoned herself to be not only a planner and plotter, but one whose plots and plans had been carried to a successful *dénouement*. Min divined her pride; and yet she did not assign to herself the credit.

"I've been an instrument, Master Min," she said.

"You have, indeed," Min assented gravely.

"I've wondered and wondered," murmured Susan, "why such a stupid old silly as I remain held so tight on to living."

"You don't mean that now you are ready to go?"

"No, Master Min, I want to live just as long as I can."

"Poor old Susan! You've had some hard times."

"Bad? Yes. When my Miss Doro began to play ducks and drakes with her good name, I nearly died. But there, we're tougher than we think."

"That's true," said Min.

Very shortly after this, these conspirators sneaked out of the back garden, Min carrying

a portmanteau, and Susan following with hand-bag and umbrella. At the back door stood a fly.

"Good-bye, you old duck!"

Regardless of the driver, who looked very much astonished, Min embraced Susan with vigour. Then he entered the fly, and told the coachman to drive to the station.

Susan went back to the house. Half an hour later she gave to Dorothy Min's letter; but she left the room before Dorothy broke the seal.

"Darling Mother" (it began), "When you open this I shall have started for Paris, where I shall find work waiting for me—the work I like, the work of a journalist, which may lead to everything nowadays.

"Why have I left you so suddenly?"

"I don't know that I can tell you quite honestly. But I'll try. Yesterday afternoon I called at the Deanery, at the Barracks, upon Mr. Heseltine—who is a stunner and no mistake—and upon the Head Master. At the Barracks I was lucky enough to find the colonel in. I told everybody the truth, and what you did for me. They won't cut you again, you angel, but you may have to cut and run from them. My father doesn't know what I have done. He told me to tell you that he would look after my future, and with the attention I am going to give to that same, I ought to flourish. Because I'm nobody, I'm the keener to make

myself somebody. Do you remember what you said when we looked at the gaol from the Battery Hill about the children of love ; that there was a place for them, and that Nature sometimes made them stronger than the others ?

“ But why have I run away ?

“ Well, the snob is not quite out of me, but the beast is dying ; I can feel him squirming feebly. I couldn't face the crowd, not even with you beside me. So I offed it. I'll write from Paris.

“ Your own son, for ever and ever,

“ MIN.”

Later, Dorothy showed the letter to Susan.

“ His father persuaded him to do this.”

“ Not he.”

“ Susan, it has driven him from his home— from us.”

“ We can follow him.”

“ I think not ; he has left us. Oh, Susan, it is a great thing that he has done, but I have lost him—I have lost him.”

She sat down trembling, realising that the moment which all loving mothers dread had come to pass. The young bird had flown from the nest, and she was left in it alone !

At luncheon Susan tried to tempt her with the famous omelette which she had learned to make in Touraine. Dorothy could hardly swallow a morsel. Her eyes rested on the small silver mug upon the sideboard which

Min had used as a child. There were other mugs, trophies recording his success as an athlete and racquet player; and on the mantel-shelf lay one of his pipes, overlooked in the excitement of a sudden departure. Susan hung about: anxious to console, but unable to speak; Dorothy went into her own room, and looked at half a dozen objects, quite worthless in themselves, which she valued far more than her best coloured prints. She had Min's first shoe, several locks of hair, gradually darkening in tint, each dated, a tiny front tooth which he had pulled out in great triumph, his best frock worn just before he was breeched, his first letter, and an absurd black, curly-coated dog without which the urchin refused to go to bed.

The dog brought to mind Solomon and his son, Benjamin. After Benjamin's death, Dorothy lived without a dog, because she had the feeling that his place could never be filled.

"He has left me," she whispered again and again.

And in her heart she knew that Min did not wish her to follow him to Paris. She guessed that the most ardent desire of his heart was not to cancel his obligation, but to prove that her never-failing tenderness and self-sacrifice had not been manifested in vain; that he, in his turn, must find a fitting home for her: the work of his head and hands. And what

more natural? She told herself that she rejoiced in his strength of purpose, in his pluck in his self-effacement. And yet the stupendous fact remained that he was gone, that he would never come back quite the same, that the sweet order had passed away: the boy had passed away childish things for ever—she looked at the curly-coated dog and sighed—he was now and henceforth concerned only with what appertained to the man.

Presently, Susan bustled up to say that Mrs. Heseltine wished to see her. Dorothy was tempted to send down an excuse, but she ended by receiving the small, bright-eyed little woman.

"Min told us everything," she burst out "and indeed I had to come and tell you, what you know already, that he is one of the best, my David says—one of the best."

"But he has gone."

"My dear, they all go."

"Your David did not leave you."

"He would leave me at a word from you."

"If I could have said that word——"

"My dear, I think I understand; and so do I. And we always knew, both of us, that you were the most wonderful creature. Dear me! Here is Mrs. Chatfield coming to call."

She rose, guessing the nature of Mrs. Chatfield's errand, but Dorothy, with slightly heightened colour, begged her old friend to remain.

"It will make it easier for me. She cut us only last Sunday, but I bear her no malice."

Mrs. Chatfield came in, rather red and shiny of complexion. When she spoke, the words dropped from her mouth one by one with measurable pauses between, as if she had carefully appraised their value and weight, and dealt them out somewhat grudgingly:

"Miss—Fairfax—you—will—forgive—me?"

"Never! if you say another word."

Mrs. Chatfield sat down, glancing at Mrs. Heseltine.

"The town can talk of nothing else," she said. "My first housemaid, an invaluable servant, gave me warning this morning—most unprovoked, but I assure you I have hardly thought of her. The dean found it difficult to settle down to his work. Forgive me, but did Lady Ipswich know the truth?"

"No," Dorothy replied. "Please say no more, Mrs. Chatfield."

"But, Miss Fairfax, you will be interested to know what dear Lady Andover says."

"Upon my honour, I am indifferent."

"She uses the word 'heroine.'"

Mrs. Heseltine nodded her approval of the substantive. Dorothy felt exceedingly uncomfortable. This was what Min would call "slopdoshing." And "heroine" sounded to her ludicrously inappropriate. For she was profoundly sensible that at bottom she was the

most unheroic and selfish of women, because she wished passionately that Min had had his tongue and remained bound to her apron strings.

The prattle of the ladies, flowing faster and faster now that the awkward moment had passed, fell upon Dorothy's dreaming ears. Min had played his part so as to secure for her an interminable new lease of life in Winchester. Presently, her visitors rose to take leave. Mrs. Chatfield glanced out of window.

"The days are drawing in, are they not? Soon winter will be upon us; and, as one grows older, the winters seem to come round faster and to last longer, as I was saying to the dear only yesterday. Good-bye. And you have *really* forgiven me?"

They went away: excellent women, reflecting faithfully the conventions and traditions of the College and the Close.

"I am Miss Fairfax," said Dorothy, "and winter is coming upon me."

She went to the window from which such a far-reaching view of the St. Cross Road was obtained. To the right lay the cemetery with its sentinel elms guarding the time-stained stones beneath them; to the left, not a quarter of a mile distant, rose the spires and pinnacles of the ancient College; in front, out of sight but hard by, the Itchen flowed tranquilly to the sea.

Standing at the window, Dorothy told her

self that she had loved Winchester because it had been kind to Min. Without Min, Winchester would become intolerably dull and tiresome. If she followed him to Paris—?

A memorable half hour followed, in which reason wrestled with impulse. Dorothy had a vision of a charming cottage just outside Paris—on the river, of course—near Passy or Auteuil. Fancy wreathed it with honeysuckle and roses, furnished it delightfully, painted it white with apple-green shutters and palings.

She smiled derisively, knowing that she was evoking shadow not substance. Men like Min did not attain their full stature in sweet-smelling cottages, tended by loving women: pleasaunces encompassed by apple-green palings. No; Min must range free, fighting for his own hand, as his father had fought before him.

His father.

Inevitably her thoughts turned to Dick. Susan brought the tea-things and a smoking-hot Sally Lunn.

"I thought may be you'd fancy that."

"Thank you, Susan. By the way, don't let me be disturbed. I'm not at home whoever calls."

"Very good, ma'am," said Susan.

Dorothy sat on after she had drunk her tea, staring into the fire, thinking of Min's father, who now cared more for his ambitions, his position, than he did for her. How small a

thing love was to men! how great, how overmastering a domination to women!

She closed her eyes with the reflection that she was old and tired and faded. No doubt chivalry or gratitude—not any warmer feeling—had brought Dick to Winchester. In any case, he had gone away furious. He would never forgive her.

It was the hour when—so doctors tell us—the physical powers of those no longer young are at a low ebb. Dorothy lay back in her chair, exhausted: sensible—perhaps for the first time in her life—that winter now coming on would not be followed by spring. And somewhere a girl was growing up who would be Min's wife: the first woman in all the world to him.

She shivered slightly. At that moment she heard the door-bell ring, and a step outside as Susan answered the bell. Then the door of the drawing-room opened.

"Who was it, Susan?" Dorothy asked, without turning her head.

As Susan did not answer, she turned her head and saw Dick. Immediately she rose, confused, taken at a disadvantage, feeling that she was not strong enough to cope with this masterful man.

"Oh, it's you," she said helplessly.

He came forward, slowly.

"I knew I should find you alone, and——"

"Min told you."

"He wrote me a line saying that he was leaving for Paris. I have offered him work. He's a good boy. He'll go far. We need not worry about his future."

She wondered if he knew what Min had done. His next words showed her plainly that he did not.

"Yesterday," he continued gravely, "I entreated you to let me clear your good name, once and for all; I still think it would be the wise thing to do, but so far as I am concerned, I urge it no longer. You must do what you think best for yourself and the boy. It's hard for me to put myself into your shoes——"

He paused.

"Won't you sit down, Dick? Have you had tea?"

"Hang tea! Dorothy, I've pushed myself in here—Susan, by the way, must be held blameless—to say that if the boy must be first, let me be second."

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday, I was a selfish, self-inflated ass. I had the cheek to believe that the country wanted me, and that you wanted me, and that neither could worry along without me."

"The country does want you."

"Does it? I am not so sure of that."

He laughed grimly.

"How dark it is getting."

"Don't ring for the lamps! This firelight

is kind to you, Doll. Perhaps it is kind to me. Perhaps it softens what lies below as well as what is on the surface. Don't rise for the lamps—yet!"

In the firelight he looked smilingly into her troubled face, into the eyes which shrank from him and yet turned back to his. Unconsciously he had assumed a pose familiar long ago. So he had stood looking down upon her, one elbow upon the mantelpiece, upon the hearth-rug at the Doll's House in Oakley Street. At the soft glow of the embers was kind to him, obliterating the lines upon his face, softening the masterful glance of the eyes.

"Doll," he said, and his voice changed slightly, losing its remarkable inflection and power, "you don't want me, do you, but I wonder if you know how badly, how desperately, I want—you?"

She made no answer.

"I want you so badly," he whispered, "that I'll chuck this big thing, which somehow does seem so very big after all, for your sake. I've tried to bargain yesterday. To-day, Doll, I surrender—unconditionally. If you will let me live under a cloud, I'll live under one with you, gladly. We'll"—his voice reminded her irresistibly of the old Dick—"we'll share the same umbrella. If England doesn't suit you, we'll find another country. North, south, east or west: it's all the same to me, if you'll let me come too. Doll"—the last rag of restraint

fell from him, as he concluded desperately—
“for God’s sake, come and take care of me.”

“You don’t know what Min has done?”

“Min?”


She told him, showed him the letter. He read it silently, weighing every word written or implied. Then he said slowly, “He is your son.”

“Dick, he has gone from me for ever. Oh, I know.”

“That is true,” he answered slowly. “And there is not a true mother in all the world who has not felt the pangs which are tearing you. Doll, at this moment, don’t you think that you do want me a little: about one twentieth as much as I want you? I asked you yesterday in my arrogance to let me take care of you; a minute ago I asked you with greater reason to take care of me; now, for the third time, I beseech you to let us take care of—each other.”

Susan Judkins said afterwards, with a complacency which Min adequately described as “fat,” that nothing else could possibly have happened.

“No sensible person,” she remarked, “could think of *my* Miss Dorothy as an old maid.”



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